Dissertations   Student Work

8-2023

A Qualitative Case Study Into the Electronic Correspondence Between Fifth-Grade Students and Their College Mentors

Kevin Pribnow

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY INTO THE ELECTRONIC
CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN FIFTH-GRADE
STUDENTS AND THEIR COLLEGE MENTORS

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements of the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Kevin Pribnow

College of Education and Behavioral Sciences
School of Teacher Education
Educational Studies

August 2023

This Dissertation by: Kevin Pribnow

Entitled: *A Qualitative Case Study into the Electronic Correspondence Between Fifth-Grade Students and Their College Mentors*

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Education in The College of Education and Behavioral Sciences in The School of Teacher Education, Program of Educational Studies.

Accepted by the Doctoral Committee:

_____

Suzette Youngs, Ph.D., Research Advisor

_____

Margaret Berg, Ph.D., Committee Member

_____

Deborah Romero, Ph.D., Committee Member

_____

Stacy Bailey, Ph.D., Faculty Member

Date of Dissertation Defense _____

Accepted by the Graduate School

_____

Jeri-Anne Lyons Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School
Associate Vice President of Research

ABSTRACT

Pribnow, Kevin. *A Qualitative Case Study into the Electronic Correspondence Between Fifth -Grade Students and Their College Mentors.* Unpublished Doctor of Education Dissertation, University of Northern Colorado, 2023.

The ability to navigate emerging technologies is necessary for social and economic participation in the world. Research shows that children from privileged households receive the support needed to develop digital literacy skills, while children from families with lower socio-economic status do not receive this support. It is the responsibility of schools to address this participation gap by bringing digital literacies into classrooms. The affordances of new technologies make it easier than ever for teachers to provide authentic literacy experiences for their students. This qualitative case study examined an authentic, digital literacy experience during a virtual pen pal correspondence between fifth-grade students and a local college women's basketball team. The written correspondence was analyzed through topic tracking and by applying Rafaeli's Model of Interactive Communication. The students' images were also analyzed to gain a deeper understanding of multimodal composition. Analysis found the facilitating teacher motivated her students to participate in the written exchanges by incorporating tenets of authentic literacy pedagogy. The authentic literacy experience motivated the students to participate in the exchanges, but interactive communication was determined by the participants' interests. The benefits experienced by the students show a need for scaffolded experiences for children to develop the competencies needed to participate using virtual communication tools. Schools need to expand their definition of literacy beyond the targets found on standardized tests to provide meaningful literacy experiences for students with

computer-mediated communication. Findings also indicate a need for teacher professional development furthering their understanding of multimodal composition.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The recent global pandemic and accompanying rise of virtual communication to maintain social distancing guidelines exposed the existing digital divide between economically marginalized students and their peers. When schools across the country abruptly closed their doors in March of 2020, one in four students from families making less than $30,000 a year lacked access to technology or an internet connection (Tsekova, 2020). Even though school districts are now using federal aid to provide every student with their own device (Jordan, 2020), the gap remains between those students who can navigate ever-changing information and communication technologies (ICT) and those who cannot (Jenkins, 2009; Rowsell et al., 2017). This problem has been described as the *participation gap*; the gap between those individuals with the competencies to virtually participate effectively in today's social and economic communities and those without (Jenkins, 2009; Kalantzis et al., 2003).

Simply providing equal access to technology and an internet connection will not solve this participation gap, because children do not acquire the competencies needed to navigate new technologies by themselves. To gain these skills children require the assistance of a more knowledgeable mentor to scaffold their understanding of unfamiliar platforms (Jenkins, 2009; Kimbell-Lopez et al., 2016; Neumann & Celano, 2006; Rowsell et al., 2017). Privileged households are able to support their children's use of new technologies to accelerate their learning by directing them to specific learning tools, helping them access material they cannot

1

read, and sharing their level of expertise in navigating digital environments (Jenkins, 2009; Rowsell et al., 2017). Children from families with a lower socioeconomic status (SES) do not receive the same level of support while engaging with new technologies, and in turn they gain less from their use (Gee, 2015; Jenkins, 2009; Neumann & Celano, 2006; New London Group, 1996; Rowsell et al., 2017). Due to this disparity in support, the participation gap between lower SES students and their affluent peers is widening (Gee, 2015; Jenkins, 2009; Rowsell et al., 2017).

Schools provide the best opportunity for all children to receive the mentoring needed to gain the capacities to navigate unfamiliar ICT (Jenkins, 2009). According to the influential New London Group (1996), it is the mission of education to prepare students to participate in the world that awaits them when they finish school. They write in their article *Pedagogy of Multiliteracies* (New London Group, 1996),

> If it were possible to define generally the mission of education, one could say that its fundamental purpose is to ensure that all students benefit from learning in ways that allow them to participate fully in public, community, and economic life. Literacy pedagogy is expected to play a particularly important role in fulfilling this mission. (p. 60)

The ways of participating in our world continue to evolve with advances in technology and changes to society. The screen has now overtaken print as the most important method of communication, and with this shift comes new affordances and constraints that require new competencies for virtually sending and receiving information (Gee & Hayes, 2011; Kalantzis et al., 2003; Kress, 2003; Lankshear & Knobel, 2013). These competencies have been called terms such as 21st century skills, digital literacies, or new media literacies. Researchers (Eshet-Alkalai,

2012; Jenkins, 2009) and organizations such as Common-Sense Media, New Media Consortium, Teaching Tolerance, and the Common Core have put forth specific competencies required to be digitally literate. Schools typically base their digital literacy curriculum on the widely adopted Common Core Standards which includes three main strands (Loewus, 2016). These strands include the following competencies.

- Demonstrate proficiency in the use of computers and applications as well as an understanding of the concepts underlying hardware, software and connectivity.
- Demonstrate the responsible use of technology and an understanding of ethics and safety issues in using electronic media at home, in school and in society.
- Demonstrate the ability to use technology for research, critical thinking, decision making, communication and collaboration, creativity and innovation.

Although a vast majority of states have adopted the Common Core digital literacy standards (Loewus, 2016), digital literacy instruction remains on the periphery of classroom literacy instruction (Gee & Hayes, 2011; Rowsell et al., 2017). The demands from federally mandated standardized tests narrow schools' literacy curriculum to focus on the isolated skills found on these tests (Au, 2007; Rowsell et al., 2017). In addition to narrowing literacy curriculum, targeting isolated literacy skills often leads to teacher-centered instructional practices that remove the students' literacy experiences from meaningful social contexts (Au, 2007; Gee, 2015; Kalantzis et al., 2003; Street, 1984). Removing literacy instruction from social contexts has been referred to as the autonomous model of literacy (Street, 1984). The defining characteristic of this model is the separation of oral and written communication (Collins & Blot, 2009; Gee, 2015; Street, 1984). Oral language is viewed as a social form of communication inherent in all societies. Spoken words are directed to a particular individual and are constantly

3

modified according to the feedback received. In this sense, communicative functions determine

oral language (Gee, 2015; Street, 1984). Oral language is contrasted with written language which

occurs over time and space and is less subject to feedback, therefore removing it from

interpersonal functions. Removed from shifting social purposes, proponents of the autonomous

model of literacy view the rules of writing as more or less stable over time. Unlike oral language,

which is acquired through social use, the rules of written language are viewed as learned skills.

This, in turn, typically leads to teacher-centered literacy instruction where they model written

language use and the students imitate (Gee, 2015; Kalantzis et al., 2003).

In opposition to teacher-centered literacy instruction, sociocultural linguists argue writing

is an interpersonal act of communication (Gee, 2004, 2015; Kalantzis et al., 2003; Magnifico,

2010). The author of a text has an audience and a purpose in mind during composition, creating a

relationship between the composer, text, and audience that is situated in the broader context of

the communication (Beard, 2009; Gee, 2004; Kress, 2010). Individuals create messages by

taking into consideration all aspects of the communicational situation, "his or her interests; the

characteristics of the audience; the semiotic requirements of the issue at stake; and the resources

available for making an apt representation" (Kress, 2010, p. 26). Sociocultural linguists view the

audience and the social situation of the communication as an essential component for written

composition as it serves as the primary motivation for writing and determines the design choices

made by the author (Kress, 2010; Magnifico, 2010).

For schools to prepare students to communicate in a diverse social and economic world,

teachers must connect students to *authentic audiences* in order to socially situate their students'

classroom literacy experiences (Gee, 2015; Kalantzis et al., 2003; Magnifico, 2010). Research

has shown that the real-world accountability that comes from purposefully communicating with

someone outside of the classroom increases the engagement of students and makes them much more involved with the revision process (Chen & Brown, 2011; Dinkins, 2014; Kessler, 2005; Spanke & Paul, 2015; Wiggins, 2009). Students feel a greater sense of purpose in their literacy projects and have a stronger dedication to task completion. Upon completion of the task, students feel a higher sense of confidence in their ability to communicate in meaningful situations (Spanke & Paul, 2015).

One way teachers have connected their students to authentic audiences is via pen pal correspondence. Pan pals have been shown to motivate students to write (Larrotta & Serrano, 2012; Lui, 2002), develop cross curriculum connections (McMillon, 2009; Patton et al., 2017; Shandomo, 2009), and lead to writing growth (Stanford & Siders, 2001; Walker-Dalhouse et al., 2009). Researchers found that students model the language of the other participant in the pen pal exchanges (Crowhurst, 1990). Connecting students to audiences outside of the classroom used to be difficult with traditional print materials. Now with the interactive capabilities of computer-mediated communication (CMC) students can be connected to audiences from around the world with ease (Alvermann et al., 2012; Gee, 2015; Magnifico, 2010). Interacting virtually with audiences from outside of the classroom has been shown to have positive effects on the participants. Studies into interactive communication show that when individuals interact virtually with each other they experience greater sense of belonging, have a high sense of satisfaction participating in the discussion, and therefore are more motivated to participate (Rafaeli & Sudweeks, 2006).

Educators can address the participation gap experienced by marginalized students by harnessing the interactive capabilities of the internet to provide all students with scaffolded experiences virtually communicating with authentic audiences. Research is still needed into how

emerging technologies can be utilized to connect students to outside audiences, and how interacting with virtual audiences can be used to provide students with authentic literacy experiences. It is crucial for educational researchers to identify characteristics that can lead to virtual interactivity in classroom contexts in order to help teachers socially situate meaningful language experiences for their students.

Overview of the Case

This qualitative case study examined the virtual mentorship between a fifth-grade classroom and a local university women's basketball team. The mentorship was developed by Miss Johnson, a fifth-grade teacher who also served as a volunteer assistant coach on the basketball team. Miss Johnson saw the opportunity to satisfy the community service requirement for the women's basketball team while at the same time connecting her students to mentors to assist in the areas of college and career readiness, teamwork, and academic behaviors.

In the previous three years of the mentorship, the student athletes served as pen pals exchanging handwritten letters approximately once a month. Each year, the team also would make three or four face-to-face visits to the school for collaborative learning activities with their mentees. Miss Johnson adapted the mentorship each year to meet the needs of her students. Her first two years, she largely used the mentors to serve as an audience to motivate her students to complete their classroom writing assignments. The following year she switched to teaching third grade and increased the amount of face-to-face contact to focus on team-building activities with the mentors and her younger students.

For the year this case study took place, Miss Johnson changed the focus of the mentorship based on the needs brought about by the unique circumstances of the Covid-19 quarantines. After months of virtual learning from home, she had concerns for students

struggling, being isolated, and academically disengaged. Her focus for the mentorship was to promote social interactions with her students, and for their mentors to provide socioemotional support during the isolation brought about by the pandemic quarantines. At the same time, she wanted to use the communication for the mentorship to motivate her students to write during a time when academic accountability was extremely low.

A total of nineteen fifth-grade students and nine college mentors participated in the mentorship. Each college mentor was assigned two students to correspond with. The virtual contact between the students and their mentors lasted for six months during the 2020/21 school year. The students and their mentors corresponded through Google Slides a total of twelve times, six times each. Towards the end of the correspondence there was a synchronous Zoom meeting between the students and their mentors.

To gain an understanding of the interactions that occurred between the students and their mentors, I applied descriptive topic codes and tracked them throughout their messages. This allowed me to apply Rafaeli's (1988) Model of Interactive Communication (Figure 2.1) to examine the level of interactive communication that occurred between the students and their mentors. In addition to the topic analysis, the students' images in their messages were also analyzed using Marsh and White's (2003) Taxonomy of Image and Message Functions to gain an insight into how the students used images when communicating virtually. Besides the participants' correspondence through Google Slides, I conducted interviews with Miss Johnson, her sixteen students, and their nine mentors. I also included student reflections and teacher instructions in this case study.

Problem Statement and Research Questions

The role of literacy pedagogy in schools is to prepare students to participate in their public, community, and economic lives (New London Group, 1996). Today, that means the ability to navigate digital environments where communication occurs through screens and not printed text (Gee & Hayes, 2011; Rowsell et al., 2017; Thibaut & Curwood, 2017). Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is now at the forefront of people's social and work lives. With it, comes a new skill set for our 21st century learners (Peregoy et al., 2013; Thibaut & Curwood, 2017). Affordances of new technologies can connect students to authentic audiences to provide social contexts essential for language use. With teacher scaffolding within these social contexts, students can develop the competencies to participate in virtual spaces (Jenkins, 2009).

To better understand how preadolescent students communicate virtually with an interactive audience this qualitative case study examined the use of ICT to create a virtual mentorship between fifth-grade students and college mentors. A deeper understanding of how the students interacted with an outside audience, besides their teacher, helped develop an understanding of how educators can situate their literacy instruction for communicative contexts. This case study was guided by the following research questions.

Q1   How did Miss Johnson facilitate the virtual correspondence between her fifth-grade students and their college mentors?

Q2   What contributed to high levels of interactive communication during written correspondence between the fifth-grade students and their college mentors?

Q3   How did fifth-graders incorporate images with their written text to communicate virtually with their mentors?

Rationale for Methods

The methods for this study were guided by a social constructivist view of reality. Social constructivists believe individuals construct subjective meanings through their social interactions

with the external world (Crotty, 2015). In line with social constructivism, I employed qualitative data collection methods to study the mentorship between the fifth-grade students and their mentors. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The goal of this qualitative research was to understand the experiences of the participants during their virtual interactions.

A single case study design was used to examine the virtual mentorship between the students and their mentors. This design was appropriate for the study because of the clear, bounded system in which the communication occurred (Yin, 2003). All virtual communication between the participants was captured on digital platforms which allowed me to access every interaction. These digital artifacts allowed for in-depth analysis of the communication that occurred within the bounded system of the partnership. The case study methodology also allowed for the context of the case to be included in the study (Yin, 2003). Including the unique context of the Covid-19 quarantines was essential to understanding the experiences of the participants.

Selection of the Case

I selected the mentorship between the fifth-grade students and their mentors for a case study because of the unique nature of the interactions between the participants. The fifth-grade students were writing for an outside audience that was occurring virtually which allowed for multimodal composition. Examination of the virtual correspondence allowed me to add to bodies of research in two different areas: virtual interactivity and multimodal communication.

This case provided a unique opportunity to closely examine students' writing for communicative purposes with an audience from outside of the classroom. In this mentorship, the

mentors served as an authentic audience for an extended period. While virtual communication has been pervasive in society for some time now, it is a relatively new endeavor for connecting students to outside audiences (Alvermann et al., 2012). Typically, in classroom settings, a vast majority of students' writing is targeted to the teacher for evaluative purposes (Alvermann et al., 2012; Paretti, 2009). In contrast to writing for the teacher, writing for audiences outside of the classroom has been shown to lead to positive outcomes. Examination of this case provided the opportunity to understand more about the student outcomes when writing to authentic audiences.

The correspondence between the fifth-graders and their mentors occurred in Google Slides which allowed for multimodal communication between the participants. This was another revelatory aspect of this case. Academic literacy tends to privilege the written word (Kress, 2003; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001). Images are not often included in students' writing in schools. For the mentorship, the students were allowed to incorporate images with their messages. Studying how the students incorporated images with their written messages helped to understand how preadolescent students create multimodal messages.

Although the social context for the communication for the mentorship is unique, examination of this case provided a deeper understanding of interactive virtual correspondence that can be applied to other educational settings. Teachers in classrooms around the country have access to technology and programs used in the case and will be able to add to their literacy practice through examination of this case.

Rationale for Research Question 1

Research Question 1 sought to understand how Miss Johnson facilitated the partnership between her students and their mentors. Understanding how she facilitated the interactions can help other educators facilitate similar literacy experiences for their students. Miss Johnson's

facilitation is of particular interest because of the demographics of her students. Miss Johnson facilitated her partnership with a diverse group of students whose home literacy does not necessarily support the literacy practices found in schools. These marginalized students are an important focus in schools' efforts to eliminate the gaps experienced by them.

This was a relatively unique literacy experience for Miss Johnson and her students. There are limited curricular resources supporting educators facilitating such authentic literacy practices. Most of the classroom writing curriculum is for student writing pieces targeted to the teacher, but in this case, she was facilitating interactions with an outside audience. Miss Johnson's instructional decisions directing topic choices, providing corrective feedback, and setting expectations will help other educators see how she connected her students to an audience outside of the classroom.

Miss Johnson facilitated interactive communication between her students and their mentors. As will be discussed in Research Question 2, interactive communication over virtual platforms leads to positive outcomes for the participants. Examining how Miss Johnson facilitated the interactions is beneficial to other educators looking to provide their students with similar beneficial communicative experiences for their students.

Rationale for Research Question 2

Research Question 2 sought to gain a deeper understanding of interactive communication in virtual spaces. Theories involving virtual interactivity posit that interactive communication between participants is a continuum with communication being more or less interactive (Cover, 2006; McGrail & Behizadeh, 2017; Rafaeli, 1988). The interactivity of communication increases with the connectedness of the messages between participants. Interactive communication in virtual spaces has been shown to lead to several positive outcomes for the participants such as

feelings of acceptance and motivation to participate (Cover, 2006; McGrail & Behizadeh, 2017; Rafaeli, 1988). Understanding more about what leads to interactive communication can help educators facilitate communicative situations to motivate their students to produce writing for meaningful situations. When this interactive communication occurs virtually, students can get the experiences and scaffolding necessary to develop the competencies to participate in today's screen-dominated world.

Rationale for Research Question 3

Research Question 3 sought to deepen understanding of how students incorporate images with their written messages. Studying this partnership allowed me to see how students use digital resources for purposeful communication with authentic audiences outside of the classroom. Today's literacy instruction favors the printed word over other modes of communication. CMC provides affordances that traditional media does not allow. Written text can be incorporated with video and images providing countless design choices for authors. Understanding more about how students incorporated images with their messages will help educators scaffold their students' multimodal design when virtually communicating.

Researcher Assumptions

As a beginning teacher, I remember struggling with the disconnect between my literacy instruction professional development and my day-to-day experiences with my students. Time and time again I would go to writing courses to discuss esoteric writing standards and complex rubrics while in my classroom I was struggling to get my students to put their pencil to a piece of paper. Then, during my master's program, I came across the book *Literacy Con Cariño: A Story of Migrant Children's Success* (Hayes et al., 1991). In this book, the authors describe how they engaged their beginning English speaking students with meaningful writing experiences. They

describe their students' communicating to the teacher with dialogue journals, writing letters to their families, and collaborating on scripts for readers' theater performances (Hayes et al., 1991). The book paints a lovely portrait of a classroom where students are acquiring language in meaningful, engaging settings. Upon reading about these educational experiences, I remember immediately thinking that's exactly what literacy instruction should look like. *Literacy Con Cariño* made sense to me as an educator. Students need to enjoy literacy experiences to care about acquiring it.

In my own classroom I've attempted to implement authentic literacy practices for my students. While I have found success in motivating students, I've struggled to see the language development especially in terms of academic genres. While it's important to provide diverse literacy experiences for students, the students need the skills to write for academic genres to be successful in school. I've always thought there must be a way to connect the motivation from authentical communication with academic writing and concepts.

I'm studying this case because I think authentically communicating with audiences from outside the classroom holds great learning potential for students. The ease of which technology allows students to connect to audiences compared to traditional print should enhance literacy instruction in the classroom, but it has yet to. Instructional demands of literacy tests have provided less time for authentic literacy experience in classrooms. I conducted this research in hope to expand existing research in literacy education to search for potential benefits of authentic, meaning-making experiences for students. Hopefully more research into the benefits of authentic literacy practices will help schools expand the narrow focus of literacy to allow for more time for more authentic literacy practices.

Organization of Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. In this first chapter I provided the sociocultural foundations for the case study into the virtual mentorship. I included the problem statement, the rationale for the methodology, and my assumptions as the researcher. In Chapter Two, I present the literature relevant to the study. I discuss studies in the areas of authentic writing tasks, interactive virtual correspondence, and pen pals. In Chapter Three, I provide a detailed description of the case, setting, and participants. I also include the methods for data collection, analysis, and ethical considerations of the research. In Chapter Four, I present the findings organized around each of the research questions. In Chapter Five, I discuss the conclusions and implications from the findings by connecting them to existing research. The appendices include the program overview, consent forms, interview questions, and full transcripts of the correspondence discussed in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the following literature review, I present the research relevant to the case study into the virtual correspondence between Miss Johnson's fifth-grade students and their college mentors. I organized the literature by beginning with the larger theories and concepts before narrowing in on the research most closely related to the study at hand. Organizing the relevant literature in this way allowed me to present the framework for my study while at the same time identifying a need for further research. Figure 2.1 shows the topics covered in this chapter starting with the larger concepts and then narrowing to the studies most closely related to my study.

Figure 2.1

Topics Discussed in Literature Review

Theory of Authentic Literacy Pedagogy

Authenticity in Classroom Writing Tasks

Connecting Students through Computer-Mediated Communication

Interactive Communication

Pen-pals
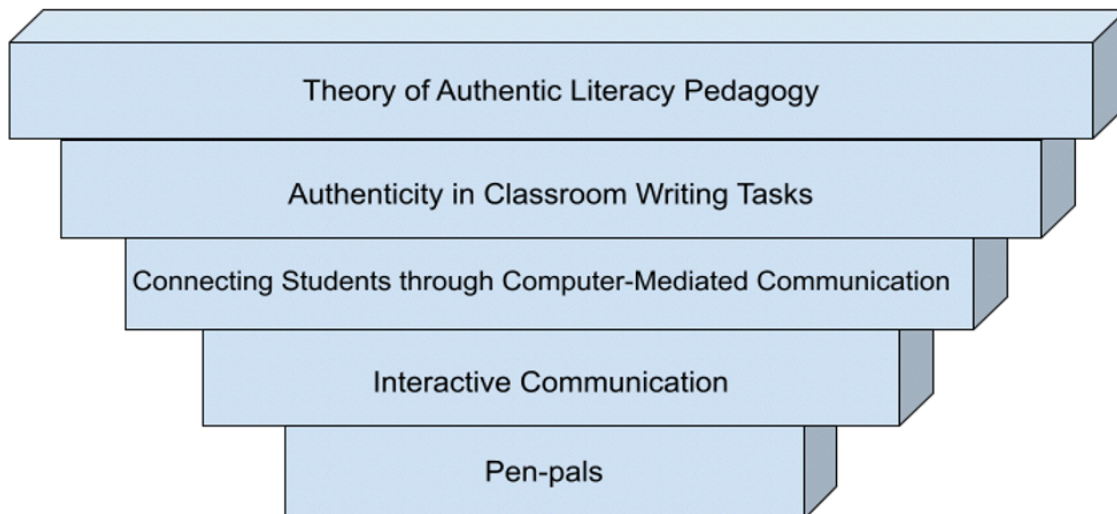
As Figure 2.1 shows, I will begin discussing the theory of authentic literacy pedagogy. I will then look closer at the research on authentic writing in the classroom. From there, I transition to the literature on computer-mediated communication (CMC) as a way for educators to connect their students to authentic audiences outside of their classroom. Next, I examine the theories on the levels of interactive correspondence through CMC while focusing specifically on the research regarding classroom pen pals as that is the research most closely related to this case. I finish the chapter by discussing the areas my study can add to the current research.

Authentic Literacy Pedagogy

Authentic literacy pedagogy developed as a criticism of the literacy practices found in early American schools (Kalantzis & Cope, 2023). At this time educators largely taught literacy through teacher-centered approaches (Kalantzis et al., 2003). Teachers often modeled literacy skills and students were evaluated on their ability to demonstrate their understanding of the skills. The isolation of literacy targets led to students being taught literacy concepts out of meaningful context (Gee, 2015; Kalantzis & Cope, 2023).

Early twentieth century progressive educational reformers, such as John Dewey, argued schooling should be viewed as a social activity. Dewey (1909) explains how a teacher-centered approach to literacy instruction fails to prepare students for their lives by removing the social aspect from language learning.

> The only way to prepare for social life is to engage in social life. To form habits of social usefulness and serviceableness apart from any direct social need and motive, apart from any existing social situation, is, to the letter, teaching the child to swim by going through motions outside of the water. (pg. 14)

Like Dewey, social constructivists in the field of education believe that social interaction is the aim of literacy instruction. As Gee (2015) simply states, "Literacy is social because the mind is social," (pg. x). Social constructivists believe if schools are to prepare students for the social world, they must form social habits within the classroom. The connection between social purpose and literacy instruction gave rise to the need for authentic literacy practices in the classroom. Supporters of authentic literacy practices posit that providing opportunities to interact with each other through reading and writing is more relevant to students' lives compared to teacher-led literacy instruction. They feel literacy in schools should replicate or reflect reading and writing activities that occur in the lives of people outside of a learning to read and write purpose (Erickson & Wharton-McDonald, 2019; Rothfusz, 2020). Today authentic literacy practices are described by many educational terms. Terms such as real-world application, problem-based learning, relevant practices, open inquiry, and project-based learning have been associated with ideas of authentic literacy practices.

Proponents of authentic literacy pedagogy argue that when students are immersed in making meaning by connecting new knowledge to what they already know, they acquire the ability to read and write naturally (Gee, 2004; Kalantzis & Cope, 2023). Opponents argue the natural process of acquiring language as being a slow process of discovery that could be circumnavigated through direct teacher instruction. Studies comparing literacy instruction found "the natural process approach did not prove to be as effective as those methods which emphasized teacher directed activities" (Lee, 1987, pg. 19).

In addition to not being as efficient as direct instruction, opponents of authentic literacy also argue it privileges advantaged students whose home literacy matches the practices found in

schools. In the absence of home literacy practices that resemble schools, Lisa Delpit (2012) argues for the need for explicit instruction in literacy skills.

> Successful teachers of children marginalized either by income-level or ethnicity—or both—have long understood that their charges not only need strong instruction in skills, but they need to know that it is skills, and not intelligence, that they lack. (pg. 15)

Delpit argues for the importance of instruction with literacy skills to properly support marginalized students in schools.

Other researchers have criticized authentic literacy experiences by suggesting they do not necessarily lead to better student outcomes (Assessor et al., 2002; Newmann et al., 1996). Reform efforts focused on authentic literacy "may lead down an illusory path where student participation in activities can become an end in itself, regardless of the intellectual quality of the students' work" (Newmann et al., 1996, pg. 2). Researchers found that when teachers made efforts for more authentic learning tasks the greatest change was in the teachers' perception of the students' engagements (Assessor et al., 2002).

There are many different perspectives regarding the benefits of authentic literacy pedagogy. The debate between explicit skill instruction and natural language acquisition through immersion will continue to be explored looking specifically at authentic writing tasks.

Authentic Writing Tasks

Looking specifically at authentic writing tasks, researchers have had difficulty determining what constitutes authenticity (Behizadeh, 2014). While many of the same characteristics are agreed upon such as a real audience, real-world application, and incorporation of students' background knowledge, (Behizadeh, 2014; Chen & Brown, 2011; Purcell-Gates et

al., 2012), some argue that the authenticity of a literacy experience can only be determined by the student participants (Assessor et al., 2002; Behizadeh, 2014).

Behizadeh contends that researchers often determine what counts as authentic for students. Instead, she proposes educational authenticity should be determined by the "student's perception that a school task connects to his/her life" (Behizadeh, 2014, pg. 28). Her study conducted 43 student interviews with 22 high school students. She also observed over one hundred hours of instruction in nine different classrooms. She found three major factors increased the authenticity of writing tasks in the eyes of students: choice of a valued topic, the importance of expression over conventions, and writing to an authentic audience (Behizadeh, 2014). The following sections will examine the research around each of these three factors influencing students' perception of the authenticity of a classroom writing task.

Topic Choice During Writing

Behizadeh (2014) found students perceived a writing task as more relevant if the topic connected to their interests or was about a person they valued. Advocates for student topic choice during classroom writing assignments argue it fosters a sense of ownership for the students compared to writing for teacher directed topics. This ownership is theorized to lead to an increase in revisions and a stronger motivation to complete the writing (Bridgeman et al., 1997). "Who wouldn't put more care into something they feel ownership over," (Aitken et al., 2022, pg. 37). While researchers typically agree that topic choice leads to greater satisfaction from the author, there is inconclusive evidence that topic choice leads to better writing outcomes for students (Bleck, 2013; Bonyadi, 2014; Bridgeman et al., 1997).

Multiple studies found topic choice led to better writing outcomes for students in terms of writing quality according to rubrics and amount of writing (Andrews, 1989; Bridgeman et al.,

1997). In a study comparing essays from high school students who had a choice of topics with those assigned by teachers, researchers found that topic choice resulted in statistically significant higher performance according to rubric scores (Bridgeman et al., 1997). Similar positive outcomes were found in a study on topic choice with third-graders writing. The third-grade students wrote significantly more words on unassigned topics than on assigned topics (Andrews, 1989).

Not all studies found that topic choice had a significant impact on the students' writing quality (Aitken et al., 2022; Assessor et al., 2002; Bleck, 2013). Bleck (2013) found that topic choice did not have a significant impact on high school students' production according to their total words written or their accuracy according to grammar rubrics. Likewise, Assessor et al. (2002) found that while high school students preferred to write about topics of their choice, their writing did not significantly improve compared to writing for teacher-directed prompts. A study into college writers found that topic choice had a statistically significant negative effect on writing quality, number of words written, and intrinsic writing motivation. Interviews with the college students found they felt more anxiety when they had a choice of topics, and felt they were taking more of a risk with their writing (Aitken et al., 2022). Assessor et al. (2002) discuss how the aims of student topic choice might never be achieved by educators as students do not see schoolwork as relevant to their lives.

> The teacher who provides choice, avoids intrusion, or tolerates criticism may intend to create a space that allows students to realize their personal goals and interests. However, it appears that many students do not feel that this open space contributes to their autonomy because they do not see any connection between any kind of schoolwork and their personal goals and interests. (pg. 273)

The inconclusive research regarding topic choice in student writing is similar to the debate between direct literacy instruction and authentic experiences. Topic choice seems to increase student engagement, but the engagement does not automatically lead to better writing outcomes for students. Bonyadi (2014) touches on the need for balance within the classroom. He concluded after finding positive effects in students' writing with both self-selected topics and teacher-directed topics that writing instructors should try to provide opportunities for choice, but also a healthy dose of teacher-assigned topics as well (Bonyadi, 2014).

Expression Over Conventions

The second factor that influenced the students' perceptions of authenticity in a writing task was if the students' teachers, or audience for the writing, valued the students' expression of their ideas over writing mechanics. In Behizadeh's study she found that twelve of the 22 students thought mechanics interfered with authenticity because a mechanical focus prevented them from expressing themselves (2014). One student shared how focusing on writing mechanics interfered with her efforts to share her ideas.

> Because you're just focusing on getting all [the mechanics] in, you don't really have time to focus on the story itself and the meaning of it. And the whole reason [the teacher's] doing that you think it's because of the meaning but it's really because she wants to see if you know how to do it. (pg.37)

This student quote is significant because it expresses the frustration with teacher feedback in response to her writing. As the student discusses, the teacher conveys the importance of writing mechanics is to clearly communicate, but she believes otherwise. She is confident the teacher understands her message, but the writing is only being read to assess the students' ability to use proper grammar. Teachers typically provide feedback when students make errors to indicate

21

what is not grammatical or acceptable in the target language grammar (Long, 1996). This has been shown to decrease student motivation while writing (Behizadeh, 2014; Long, 1996).

That is not to say that writing mechanics are irrelevant. Behizadeh (2014) touches on this point in her conclusion to the study. She writes, "This need for rebalancing mechanics and meaning does not negate the importance of mechanics, but rather suggests students will find writing more authentic when the primary purpose is to communicate, not to demonstrate proficiency (pg. 37). Lee's (2000) study with her fifth-grade creative writing students confirmed the incorporation of writing mechanics once the students are engaged in an authentic writing task. She found that grammar rules, previously considered pointless by students, mattered when the students began publishing their writing to the internet where real audiences would see it (Lee, 2000).

Authentic Audiences

The final factor found by Behizadeh that led to students perceiving a classroom writing task as more authentic was the presence of an actual audience. An authentic audience is often contrasted with the teacher as the audience. Traditionally, in classroom settings the teacher serves as the audience for a vast amount of students' writing production (Alvermann et al., 2012; Paretti, 2009). In this exchange, students produce text to demonstrate their understanding of literacy and content targets, and as discussed, the feedback received is evaluative (Paretti, 2009). The teacher has been called a *dead-end audience* because of the evaluative feedback given (McGrail & Behizadeh, 2017).

Besides the teacher, students' peers also serve as an audience for classmates' writing. Producing texts for classroom peers has been shown to be effective in motivating students if the text exchanges occur in an environment where the students intensely listen and respond to each

other's writing (Hovan, 2012). While studies have shown that peer audiences within the classroom can be effective in motivating students to improve their writing, this is compared to the teacher as the sole audience (Banegas et al., 2020). Students felt peer reviewers provided superficial feedback that they didn't always trust (Banegas et al., 2020). Researchers found that an external audience had much more influence over student motivation than a peer audience (Chen, 2005; Chen & Brown, 2011; DeFauw & Saad, 2014; Keiser, 1991; Levy, 2008; Putnam, 2001; Spanke & Paul, 2015; Wiggins, 2009).

Authentic audiences are typically defined as people from outside the immediate classroom setting (Behizadeh, 2014). This includes students from other classrooms (DeFauw & Saad, 2014; Keiser, 1991) or members of the outside community (Levy, 2008; Putnam, 2001). Research has shown that the real-world accountability that comes from purposefully communicating with someone outside of the classroom increases the engagement of students and makes them much more involved with the revision process (Chen & Brown, 2011; Kessler, 2005; Spanke & Paul, 2015; Wiggins, 2009). When communicating with people from outside the classroom, students felt a higher sense of purpose in their writing and had a stronger dedication to task completion. Upon completion of the task, students felt a higher sense of confidence in their ability to communicate during meaningful situations (Spanke & Paul, 2015). Researchers found that authentic audiences on the internet improved the quality of the students' writing. "The internet had a profound effect on the quality of student writing because the students knew that many people would be reading the work and they paid more attention to the finished product" (Lee, 2000, pg. 31).

Summary of Authentic Literacy Pedagogy

In response to teacher-centered literacy instruction, authentic literacy pedagogy aims to promote literacy development through immersion in meaning-making experiences. These experiences should be relevant to students by imitating the types of communication they will encounter in today's diverse social and economic world. Authentic literacy experiences have been shown to increase student motivation, but results are inconclusive if the increased engagement leads to better writing outcomes for students.

Researchers of authentic teaching practices argue the authenticity of a literacy experience can only be determined by the students. Studies show that students view a writing task as more relevant if it involves a topic of their choosing, they can express themselves without the interference of writing mechanics, and they are writing to authentic audiences. The following section will examine the research around connecting students to authentic audiences through computer-mediated communication.

Computer-Mediated Communication

While the benefits of connecting students with authentic audiences from outside of the classroom have been known, it was not often commonly practiced in schools due to the constraints of sharing traditional media (Alvermann et al., 2012). Now with the social capabilities of computer-mediated communication (CMC), messages and media creations can be shared instantly with authentic audiences from around the world in ways never imagined with traditional print media (Alvermann et al., 2012; Gee, 2015; Magnifico, 2010; Perumal & Ajit, 2022). Students can be connected in virtual spaces with audiences composed of actual readers and collaborators from outside of the classroom. Virtually interacting with external audiences

has been shown to make learning more authentic and experiential for students (Magnifico, 2010; Perumal & Ajit, 2022).

Although CMC has been shown to be relevant and effective in promoting students' writing, it has struggled to make it into classrooms. Literacy pedagogy in schools is typically aimed at the demands of federally mandated standardized tests which prioritize essay writing (Au, 2007; Thibaut & Curwood, 2017). Besides testing demands, teachers often have misconceptions regarding CMC that prevent them from fully implementing it into their classrooms (Park & Son, 2009). Teachers see CMC in people's everyday lives and look at it as a medium for social interaction with no academic purposes.

CMC can provide unique opportunities for students. CMC allows for multimodal communication, provides new ways for individuals to participate, and can be highly interactive. The literature around these affordances of CMC will be discussed in the following section.

Computer-Mediated Communication Allows for Multimodal Communication

CMC has the potential to be multimodal in ways traditional print communication never could. Students can communicate by utilizing a variety of presentation software to communicate through text, video, voiceover, and pictures (Carrington & Robinson, 2009; Kress, 2003; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001). Just as important as the choices made during composing written text, teachers must prepare students who can make similar choices for how they use multimodal resources to design their messages (Jewitt & Kress, 2008; Kress, 2010).

Research supports the idea that using technology to create multimodal presentations increases student motivation (Dowdall, 2009; Peregoy et al., 2013; Willett, 2009). Students gain a sense of autonomy and empowerment when they are allowed to use individual creativity in their creation of messages (Gebhard et al., 2011). By representing their knowledge through

multiple modes for authentic audiences, students can express their identity, exercise agency, and foster a sense of authoring through multimodal production. (Thibaut & Curwood, 2017)

Computer-Mediated Communication Provides New Ways to Participate

CMC helps students acquire language by creating an environment where they feel they can take additional risks with language use. CMC often allows for students to use an avatar to represent themselves online. Students feel more comfortable with learning insecurities behind a digital identity (Lamy & Hampel, 2007). Anonymity through avatars removes the fear of seeing peers' reactions when participating. This allows for students to lower their affective filter and increase their risk-taking in academic contexts (Lamy & Hampel, 2007).

CMC provides environments that allow for equality in student participation (Chapelle, 2007). In a synchronous online chat when all students are contributing to a live conversation at the same time, students can freely participate with an opportunity for wait time to formulate their answers (Chen, 2005). Asynchronous communication, where students contribute to a conversation at separate times, allows every student to properly reflect on their response and language use and to submit their answer when they are ready (Chen, 2005).

Some research shows that not all aspects of CMC are beneficial for students. The lack of pragmatics and body language clues often can impede understanding of certain messages (Lamy & Hampel, 2007). Research has also shown that anxiety can be increased by pressure to participate in synchronous communication, and even in asynchronous communication, as students feel pressured to respond (Lamy & Hampel, 2007).

Virtual Interactivity

CMC can replicate interactive face-to-face communication. Interactivity is a term used to describe interpersonal communication between people. While the communicative construct of interactivity was developed to describe traditional face-to-face conversations, the same types of interpersonal interactions now happen in virtual environments (Rafaeli & Sudweeks, 2006). Interactivity as a social process in virtual environments has been theorized as a variable with messages, threads, and groups being more or less interactive depending on the affordances of the platform and motivation of the participants (Rafaeli & Sudweeks, 2006).

Research shows that interactive virtual platforms do not ensure high levels of interactivity between the participants. For example, wikis are a highly interactive space used primarily to allow for collaborative editing, but researchers found over 99% of the 180,000 classroom wikis studied were created by single authors (Reich et al., 2012). Similar results were found in science debates facilitated through online discussion forums. Most of the posts in the forum were from a small group of students, and an overwhelming amount of the discussion threads were limited to one or two responses (Greenhow et al., 2015). These studies show that the level of interactivity in online communication is determined by the motivations of the participants and not the platform itself.

A review of literature found three models conceptualizing the levels of interactivity between participants in virtual spaces. In the following section, I will examine the three models and review the recent research on K-12 classrooms connecting students to virtual audiences.

Theories on Interactive Computer-Mediated Communication

Sheizaf Rafaeli (1988) theorized levels of interactivity occurring through mediated conversations such as those through a phone or computer. He posited the same levels of

interaction found in face-to-face contact were found in these new modes of communication.

Rafaeli viewed interactivity as a continuum with the level of interactivity determined by "the extent to which messages in a sequence relate to each other, and especially the extent to which later messages recount the information from earlier messages" (Rafaeli, 1988, p. 118). To visually represent the three levels of interactive communication he theorized Rafaeli created Figure 2.2 to model the transfer of messages between participants.

Figure 2.2

Rafaeli's (1988) Model of Levels of Interactive Communication
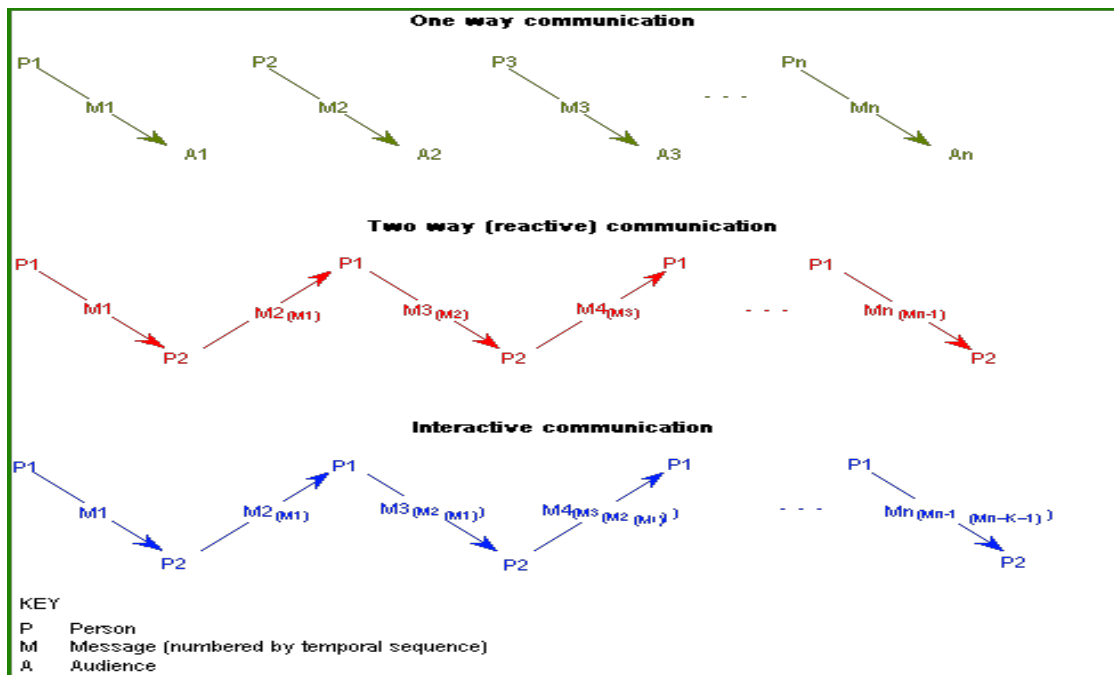
In this model, one-way communication refers to messages from one person that travels to an audience that does not provide a response. This is represented, in Figure 2.2, as one-way arrows traveling from a participant to an audience. In two-way or reactive communication, the audience responds based only on the previous message received from the person. In the highest level, interactive communication, the messages are shaped by all the previous interactions and not only the last message communicated. The difference in the reactive and interactive levels involves the

depth of the response given by the audience. If the audience is only responding to the last message, it is reactive communication, whereas if the audience takes into consideration previous messages including the audience's reaction to them, it is interactive communication (Rafaeli, 1988). Rafaeli denotes the connection of messages in his model by including them with the message.

Likewise, Rob Cover (2006) theorized three levels of audience interactivity. While the three levels are like those theorized by Rafaeli, Cover's model differs by maintaining a stronger perspective of the audience. In his first level, the audience passively receives the information and does not interact with it (Beard, 2009). This is equivalent to one-way communication in Rafaeli's model. In Cover's second level, the audience actively searches through the information, such as one would interact with text in search engines. Cover calls the third level *conversational interactivity* (Cover, 2006). This occurs when individuals interact directly with each other. The term *conversational interactivity* is used literally when direct dialogue is possible, but also metaphorically for responding to texts asynchronously (Beard, 2009). This level of audience interaction would be similar to Rafaeli's interactive communication level where the messages would depend on previous interactions.

The final framework regarding virtual interactivity reviewed was McGrail and Behizadeh's (2017) model developed from their review of K-12 multimodal assessments. They identified four levels of interactions students can have with their audience. In their first level, the audience is considered but is only imaginary. This level is unique to McGrail and Behizadeh's (2017) model and is a result of them developing their framework based on educational assessments. The limitations of classroom writing composition creates authorship demands that are unique to that setting.

McGrail and Behizadeh's final three levels share similarities to Rafaeli (1988) and Cover's (2006) models. In the second level, the audience considered is real and addressed, but not interacted or collaborated with. In the third level, the audience responds but is not engaged beyond the initial response, and in the final level the audience is engaged in interactive and participatory forms of communication and collaboration (McGrail & Behizadeh, 2017). Table 2.1 aligns the levels of interactivity in the three theories.

Table 2.1

Theories on the Level of Audience Interactivity

	Rafaeli (1988)	**Cover (2006)**	**McGrail and Behizadeh (2017)**
			Audience imagined
Level 1	One-Way Communication	Passive	Audience addressed, but now delivered
Level 2	Reactive Communication	Consultation	Audience responds with an initial response
Level 3	Interactive Communication	Conversational Interactivity	Audience helps to shape the text

Research shows that audience interaction is the most motivating factor for students producing media creations outside of school (Alvermann et al., 2012). Understanding these motivations for participation is key for teachers to facilitate highly interactive virtual learning spaces involving academic content as the level of interactivity in a virtual community is important for creating stable memberships. Interactive groups are more likely to sustain their memberships and yield other desired outcomes such as creativity, sense of belonging, and increased amounts of communication (Rafaeli & Sudweeks, 2006).

The following section will examine the research in the area of interactivity with virtual audiences in K-12 contexts. The studies included in this review took place in K-12 classroom settings and were completed in the last decade. The studies are organized according to Rafaeli's

(1988) three levels of interactivity to help understand the educational outcomes that occur at each level.

One Way Virtual Communication

In one-way virtual interactions, students are connected to audiences in a way that largely substitutes traditional classroom sharing. Media creations are either presented synchronously to a live classroom audience or posted to virtual spaces where peers can view the creations asynchronously. In the studies reviewed, students created a variety of new media literacy products such as digital stories using photos from their home and community (Pandya & Low, 2019), multimodal narratives that replaced traditional narrative composition (Kimbell-Lopez et al., 2016), and video responses to classroom literature (Dalton & Grisham, 2013; Solomon, 2010; Vasudevan et al., 2010). In these studies, the finished media creations were shared virtually with no opportunity for audience response. The flow of information in the communication was one directional (Rafaeli, 1988).

While the practice of posting media creations for virtual audiences largely substituted the traditional practice of sharing in front of the class, research showed positive educational outcomes from the presence of the virtual audience. The most salient outcome was the increased motivation students had to produce multimodal media creations (Kimbell-Lopez et al., 2016; Pandya & Low, 2019; Vasudevan et al., 2010). This included increased participation of traditionally soft-spoken students in the presence of an in-person classroom audience (Kimbell-Lopez et al., 2016; Pandya & Low, 2019; Vasudevan et al., 2010). Researchers credited the increased engagement to the relevancy of the media literacies to the types of communication students are familiar with outside of the classroom (Kimbell-Lopez et al., 2016; Magnifico, 2010).

Students as young as first-grade began to develop an awareness of the audience when they posted their digital stories in virtual spaces (Solomon, 2010). The presence of an authentic audience aided students in the creation of their media compositions as students pictured their audiences viewing their media projects and made deliberate choices about their design based on what they perceived their audience would be feeling (Pandya & Low, 2019). Even without interactivity with the audience, there were clear benefits from posting students' media creations for others to view.

Reactive Virtual Communication

The level of interactivity with virtual audiences increases when the audience responds with a message that is related to the last one received (Rafaeli, 1988). In traditional educational settings, this is equivalent to students receiving feedback from their audience. In the studies reviewed, teachers connected their students to outside audiences for feedback in different ways. Nobles and Paganucci (2015) studied the impact of written feedback on high school students' composition projects from graduate students. Although the graduate students largely substituted the role of the teacher in providing evaluative feedback, results showed that the feedback was personalized and discussed the content of the writing (Nobles & Paganucci, 2015). While students had the opportunity to respond back to the graduate students, there did not appear to be interactions beyond the first response. In another study reviewed, researchers connected students to reactive audiences by posting students' final videos online for a larger viewing community. The researchers reported that students were afforded opportunities for receiving feedback in comment boards from virtual audiences that extended beyond school (Spires et al., 2012). The feedback was motivating to the students and added to their sense of accomplishment.

Studies connecting students to outside virtual audiences that are able to communicate reactively revealed outcomes similar to those found in one-way communication. The audience served mainly as motivation for students' literacy production. Researchers Nobles and Paganucci (2015) touch on how the distinction in the levels of interactivity of the platforms was not important to the students. "The perceived presence of an authentic audience was enough to affect student work, and that the differences in interaction between blogs and wiki platforms such as Google Sites were minimal for the students" (p. 28).

While the difference in interactivity did not impact student motivations, there were positive outcomes from the responses the students received on their media creations. The audiences did not correct the students' writing mechanics, but rather engaged with it authentically to address the ideas expressed (Nobles & Paganucci, 2015; Spires et al., 2012). Because this feedback valued the students' expression over their use of writing mechanics, it increased the authenticity of the writing tasks (Behizadeh, 2014).

Interactive Virtual Communication

Virtual spaces allow for high levels of interactivity through various types of platforms such as virtual worlds, wikis, and discussion forums. Synchronous interactions in virtual worlds mirror face-to-face interactions but with digital identities (Merchant, 2010). In a study examining interactions in Second Life in high school classrooms, students were able to engage in the virtual environment where they searched for clues to complete different tasks. Second Life is a virtual simulation world where individuals control their avatar and interact with other avatars through chat and speak. The study found interactive communication largely occurred in short, written exchanges via the chatroom. Students in the chatroom heavily used slang to communicate in shorthand to keep up with the fast-paced interactions that were occurring in real time (Merchant,

2010). Likewise, researchers found students largely used slang to communicate during synchronous chat that occurred during classroom science class. The researchers concluded the language choices were determined by the speed of the chat and need to quickly get ideas across (Chapelle, 2007).

Highly interactive virtual communication has been studied in online affinity spaces. A key component of these spaces is the desire to become a member in the community of practice. Gee (2015) called affinity spaces the ideal learning environment in which participants assemble voluntarily to pursue interests and endeavors that are shared across a diverse network of peers. This level of desire to participate in these spaces can be seen in Curwood's (2013) study on adolescents' participation in *Hunger Games* online affinity spaces. Even though participants in the study had read each novel multiple times, they continued to seek out experiences with the literature in their virtual affinity spaces. This desire to participate in fan fiction affinity spaces led the participants to create or remix different aspects of *The Hunger Games* trilogy, from the themes to the characters (Curwood, 2013).

Efforts have been made to bring the learning opportunities that result from the interactivity in affinity spaces into the classroom. Even though teachers have connected students in virtual platforms that allow for high levels of interactivity, they have struggled to achieve the level of engagement found socially in virtual environments. In one attempt to develop classroom affinity spaces, researchers worked with a school librarian to design and facilitate three-week mini courses on topics presented in user-generated affinity spaces (Lammers, 2016). The students then selected one of the topics they wanted to contribute to. In allowing this choice, the educators were hoping that interest would drive participation in similar ways it does in out of school contexts. While there was interest in the topics selected, interactivity was still low among

the participants (Lammers, 2016). Classroom created affinity spaces are missing the shared interest that drives the interactivity in passion affinity spaces.

Summary of Computer-Mediated Communication

The affordances of CMC allow for unique opportunities when incorporating it in classrooms. CMC allows students to participate in new ways compared to the traditional in-person classroom environment and allows students to easily create multimodal messages to share with audiences around the world. Not only can students share messages, but they can also interact with audiences in virtual spaces. Research shows that virtual interactions can be highly motivational to students to participate in the learning communities.

In the final section of this chapter, I will discuss the literature around pen pal correspondence and then specifically electronic pen pals. I also include the research on virtual mentoring as this literature is most closely related to my case study. I conclude by discussing the need for my study.

<div align="center">

Pen Pal Correspondence

</div>

Pen pal correspondence has been documented in schools since the early 20th century (Walker-Dalhouse et al., 2009). Pen pal writing maintains a presence in schools because of the numerous benefits documented in students. Connecting students with interactive audiences from outside the classroom through pen pal exchanges can benefit students both by providing opportunities to connect school learning to students' interests, knowledge, and experiences, and by allowing students to access the expertise of individuals from the community (Barksdale et al., 2007). Students writing to communicate effectively was shown to be a motivating factor in writing. In a study involving high school students, researchers found that 57% of them thought having someone to write to be the most motivating factor. Qualitative data found that students

were motivated by the need to communicate effectively to maintain the correspondence instead of for grades (Gambrell et al., 2011). Results from studies on pen pals have also shown that students who were reluctant to engage with academic styles of writing enjoyed writing letters to their pen pals (Barksdale et al., 2007).

Pen pal writing can provide valuable learning experiences for students even though it does not involve direct instruction in writing (Walker-Dalhouse et al., 2009). Typically, pen pal exchanges are implemented as an auxiliary activity to support the mandated curriculum and are free from the grading demands associated with classroom activities. This allows students to focus on writing to communicate meaning rather than to meet classroom writing targets and standards (Walker-Dalhouse et al., 2009). Research has shown that students often acquire skills from their pen pals. Crowhurst (1990) found that "the influence of their correspondents' letters was clearly evident. In some cases, openings or closing were adopted verbatim, in other cases, ideas were adopted though wording might be different" (pg. 14).

Educational researchers found benefits in using traditional media to connect pen pals with their audiences. Some researchers believe that it is important for younger students to develop handwriting skills early in their literacy development (Shandomo, 2009). A study found that sending traditional letters through mail helped to increase student anticipation and provided time to add auxiliary projects for students to work on (Shandomo, 2009). In a study monitoring exchanges between American and Malanese students, researchers found the time when the messages were being mailed was used to complete additional projects related to the students' pen pals.

Pen pal exchanges have shown student benefits beyond language growth. Lemkuhl (2002) connected her students in Ohio with students from Arizona. She found her students made

learning connections across all curriculum areas. After they began the pen pal project, the students became interested in reading about the areas in which their pen pals lived. In math, they learned about time zones, temperatures, and sunrise and sunset differences. In social studies they discussed topics such as culture, religion, and language, and the children practiced map skills in locating places mentioned in the letters. In science, the children examined differences in weather, and they studied the kinds of animals that live in climates such as the desert in Arizona. Topics from the pen pal correspondence could be found in all parts of their day.

Electronic Pen Pals (E-Pals)

Although educational researchers have documented clear benefits to traditional letter writing (McMillon, 2009), there is no denying the ease of sharing students' messages with audiences electronically (Alvermann et al., 2012; Gee, 2015; Magnifico, 2010). Connecting students to audiences to exchange messages has been called electronic pen pals or e-pals for short. E-pals can be connected through social media platforms allowing for written exchanges to be shared instantaneously and synchronous face-to-face interactions through video conferencing. E-pals correspondence also allows participants to incorporate different modes of communication such as images, gifs, videos, and color that would be much more difficult with traditional letter sharing (Alvermann et al., 2012; Gee, 2015; Magnifico, 2010). These types of virtual, multimodal interactions are more relevant to the world outside of the classroom in which schools are preparing them for (New London Group, 1996).

Similarly to traditional print pen pals, e-pals have been shown to lead to language development in students (Lui, 2002; McClanahan, 2001; Patton et al., 2017; Stanford & Siders, 2001). In a study of e-pal correspondence about literature, students exchanged emails discussing short stories that each class read. Researchers found that, according to unit rubrics, students

showed improvement in their writing over the course of the interaction (McClanahan, 2001).

Students cared more about the revision of their emails and sought out peer revisors to help them

edit their emails (McClanahan, 2001). In a study comparing traditional pen pals, e pals, and a

control group, researchers found significant increases in the word count of the e pals compared to

the other two groups (Stanford & Siders, 2001).

As was discussed, students acquire literacy skills from their pen pal partner (Alvermann

et al., 2012; McClanahan, 2001). To ensure this opportunity for students, educators typically

connect their students with older individuals to help scaffold growth in the students. The

following section will examine the literature virtual mentorships where students are virtually

connected with an outside audience with the specific aim of mentoring the students.

Virtual Mentorships

Mentoring has been associated with positive educational outcomes in students (Ohlson et

al., 2017). To save time and resources there has been a rise in virtual mentoring which relies on

computer-mediated interactions as opposed to face-to-face contact. Connecting students virtually

to mentors has been shown to have similar positive educational outcomes as face-to-face

mentoring interactions (Bagley & Shaffer, 2014; Ohlson & Froman, 2012). In a study comparing

the impacts of mentors meeting face-to-face with their mentees and mentors meeting through

online live video streaming, researchers found that students participating in the virtual

interactions had comparable outcomes to the students in the face-to-face group. These included

fewer suspensions and higher attendance (Ohlson & Froman, 2012). Another study comparing

the support received during an online simulation game found that mentors interacting with their

mentees via chat discussion were able to discuss the same topics as the mentors who were

providing face-to-face support with their mentees (Bagley & Shaffer, 2014).

Researchers have revealed several advantages of virtual mentoring over traditional face-to-face mentoring. Online interactions through chat or email remove barriers associated with differences in age, race, and gender (Ensher et al., 2003). This allows for mentors and mentees to have the opportunity to focus on deeper connections based on other commonalities and interests (Bagley & Shaffer, 2014). Asynchronous communication removes some of the pressures of face-to-face interactions and allows participants to feel more anonymous, allowing them to be more honest and forthcoming. The anonymous feeling of asynchronous interactions also leads to increased participation of soft-spoken students (Ohlson et al., 2017).

Mentors that focus specifically on literacy development in younger students have been shown to increase students' confidence and participation in classroom literacy instruction. In a study involving pairing mentors with students for one hour a week, researchers found that the positive relationship increased students' self-esteem and caused them to engage more in class (Hart et al., 1998). Besides motivation, literacy mentors had a positive effect on reading abilities. Children who participated in a national reading mentor program experienced greater improvement in passage comprehension and in grade-specific skills (Lee et al., 2012).

Although there are advantages to virtual mentoring, there are disadvantages as well. In asynchronous computer-mediated interactions, mentors have no access to their mentee's body language and other signals (Ohlson & Froman, 2012). Virtual mentors using asynchronous communication such as chat and email reported being frustrated by their inability to provide the type of feedback and support they typically found during face-to-face interaction (Bagley & Shaffer, 2014). When live videoconferencing was used to connect mentors and mentees, researchers found a reduction in the amount of discussion that occurred compared to face-to-face mentoring interactions (Ohlson & Froman, 2012).

Summary of Pen Pal Correspondence

Research has shown pen pal exchanges to assist with language acquisition (Stanford &
Siders, 2001), development of intercultural competence (McClanahan, 2001; McMillon, 2009;
Patton et al., 2017), content integration (Lui, 2002; Shandomo, 2009), and socioemotional
development (Shandomo, 2009). Similar positive outcomes have been shown with traditional
letter exchanges or with CMC. CMC has also been used to connect students virtually with
mentors. Again, similar positive results were seen as found with traditional face-to-face mentors.

Need for My Study

This proposed study adds to the research on virtual correspondence in classrooms. The
mentors in my study function as an interactive conversational partner driving the students'
writing. While there is considerable research on pen pal correspondence, there is significantly
less on electronic pen pals. My study focuses on the level of interactivity according to Rafaeli's
model covered in this chapter. I did not locate any studies that applied his theory to virtual pen
pal exchanges. Understanding interactive correspondence is important for educators to
incorporate CMC with authentic audiences so their students can experience the positive
outcomes outlined in this chapter.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

I employed a qualitative case study design to examine the virtual mentorship between

Miss Johnson's fifth-grade students and their mentors from a local university women's

basketball team. I selected a case study design because all communication occurred through

Google Slides or Flipgrid exchanges making the virtual interactions between the participants

clearly bounded from regular classroom interactions.

This study into the virtual mentorship served as a revelatory case due to the unique nature

of the interactions between the students and their mentors (Yin, 2003). Typically, in classroom

settings, a vast majority of students' writing is targeted to the teacher for evaluative purposes

(Paretti, 2009), but in this partnership the students wrote to correspond with a mentor from

outside of the classroom over an extended period. Using the case study methodology to examine

the correspondence allowed me to incorporate the unique context in which Miss Johnson

facilitated the mentorship to be included in the analysis. Analysis of the correspondence provided

insight into the following research questions.

Q1   How did Miss Johnson facilitate the virtual correspondence between her fifth-grade students and their college mentors?

Q2   What contributed to high levels of interactive communication during written correspondence between the fifth-grade students and their college mentors?

Q3   How did fifth-graders incorporate images with their written text to communicate virtually with their mentors?

In the following chapter, I explain how I used the case study methodology to answer these research questions. First, I provide an overview of the case including a description of the setting and the participants involved. Next, I detail the data collection procedure and explain how the data were analyzed. Finally, I conclude the chapter with my ethical considerations, the ways I increased the trustworthiness of the study, and my stance as a researcher in relation to the study.

Case Overview

This qualitative case study examined the virtual communication between fifth-grade students from an elementary school in southeast Wisconsin and their college mentors from a nearby university women's basketball team. Southeast Wisconsin is home to two cities with the largest educational and economic disparities based on race (Watson, 2019). In this part of the United States, African Americans experience four times the level of poverty as white residents leading to increases in crime, incarceration, along with lower home ownership and graduation rates (Watson, 2019). Schools in the area are highly racially segregated leading to disparities in resources along racial and socioeconomic lines.

Miss Johnson, the facilitating teacher for the mentorship, had taught in Title I schools serving disadvantaged students for her entire career and was accustomed to searching for resources to enrich her classroom instruction. The partnership began in 2017 when she saw the opportunity to satisfy the community service requirement for the basketball team she volunteered for while at the same time connecting mentors to her students to help in the areas of teamwork, college and career readiness, and academic behaviors. In the three previous years of the partnership, students and mentors met face-to-face three or four times during the women's basketball season and maintained handwritten pen pal correspondence between the face-to-face visits.

According to the Program Overview (Appendix F), Miss Johnson had witnessed several positive outcomes from the partnership. She noticed students developed a connection to their mentors causing them to be much more motivated to write to them compared to regular classroom writing assignments. She also noted that the relationship with the university players helped to broaden her students' interests and perspectives (Program Overview, Appendix F). During the year of the study, Miss Johnson had hoped that virtually connecting her students to their mentors would motivate them to write while receiving in-home instruction and provide socio-emotional support during the isolation caused by the Covid-19 quarantines.

Setting

This study took place during Miss Johnson's fourth year facilitating the mentorship as social distancing mandates brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic forced the participants to rely solely on virtual communication. At the start of the 2020/21 school year, the local school board voted that all students must receive remote instruction in response to the community spread of the Covid-19 virus. For the duration of the school year, the district provided each student with a Google Chromebook along with access to wireless internet for families who needed it. At the time of the school board's decision for all students to be instructed remotely, gating criteria were set for the return of in-person instruction. From September 2020 to March of 2021, all of Miss Johnson's students received virtual instruction from their homes through a combination of synchronous Google Meets and asynchronous digital assignments.

In-home remote instruction was challenging for Miss Johnson's students. Her students were often home alone or in charge of their younger siblings. Without adult support throughout the school day, there was no accountability for students to engage in schoolwork or to assist with navigating the learning platforms. When parents were contacted, they expressed similar

frustrations with their children's lack of academic engagement but would be helpless because of their need to work during the day. School administrators provided little support as these were unprecedented times, and there was very little that could be done to provide support for students.

In March of 2021, after a full calendar year of remote instruction, the community met the gating criteria for the reopening of schools, and students were given the option of returning to school for in-person instruction. Of Miss Johnson's 19 fifth-grade students, fourteen of them opted for in-person instruction while five remained remote. At this time, Miss Johnson provided instruction to both groups of students concurrently through the continued use of synchronous Google Meets and asynchronous digital assignments. Social distancing guidelines within the classroom forced the continued use of virtual instruction even for the fourteen students who returned to the classroom. Guidelines set by the district prevented visitors into the classroom and forced the mentorship to continue through virtual communication.

The students' writing for their mentors occurred during school hours but was not part of the mandated writing curriculum. Because the correspondence was separate from the mandated writing curriculum, the students' correspondence with their mentors was not graded, but student participation was heavily pushed by Miss Johnson. The college mentors also received virtual instruction during this time. They created their messages to the students on their own schedule, at locations of their choosing. After completing their exchanges, they were given credit for the team-mandated community service hours.

Schedule of Interactions

Prior to the start of the partnership, Miss Johnson sought approval from her school's principal and her students' parents. The principal approved the mentorship citing that it

supported both the students' literacy development and socioemotional needs. All parents

consented to their child's participation in the mentorship.

Miss Johnson served as a mediator for the correspondence to prevent the sharing of

personal contact information and help maintain the mentors' privacy. She compiled the students'

messages and sent them to their mentors and did the same with the mentors' messages. The

partnership began with an introduction Flipgrid from the mentors. Flipgrid is a free online

program that allows users to create and share videos through a controlled platform. Once the

mentors' completed their introduction video, Miss Johnson assigned two students to each

mentor. She paired students with their mentors largely based on the student's level of

engagement during regular classroom virtual learning. She wanted to ensure each mentor had at

least one student who would maintain consistent correspondence.

After assigning two students to each mentor, Miss Johnson shared the mentors'

introduction videos with her students, and they responded with a letter written in Google Slides.

According to Miss Johnson, the virtual correspondence through Google Slides was a social

activity meant to build relationships between the participants. Because of this, she provided very

little guidance for the content of the students' messages. She told students to talk about

themselves as well as learn about their mentors. She also encouraged her students to take

advantage of the multimodal affordances of Google Slides by embedding images or including

videos with their written messages. Besides embedding images and videos, the students were

allowed to design their Google Slides by choosing the font, color, size, and layout of elements.

The fifth-grade students and their mentors maintained asynchronous contact from

November to May of the 2020/21 school year through the online programs Flipgrid and Google

Slides. Throughout the mentorship twelve asynchronous exchanges occurred in Google Slides,

six from the mentors and six from the students. Towards the end of the year there was one synchronous Zoom meeting between the mentors and students that could not be recorded. Students were given the chance to reflect four times during the mentorship; after they received their first letter, after their fourth letter, after their synchronous Zoom meeting, and at the end of the mentorship. These reflections were guided with questions from Miss Johnson and occurred in either Google Forms or Google Slides. Table 3.1 shows the schedule of the interactions between the students and their mentors along with the dates of the students' reflections.

Table 3.1

Schedule of the Interactions Between Mentors and Students

Date	Participant	Artifact
10/30/20	From Mentors	Introduction Flipgrid
11/3/20	From Students	Letters
11/29/20	From Mentors	Letters
11/30/20	Students	Reflections of first letter
12/22/20	From Students	Letters
1/17/21	From Mentors	Letters
2/11/21	From Students	Letters
2/23/21	From Mentors	Letters
3/24/21	From Students	Letters
4/12/21	From Mentors	Letters
4/13/21	Students	Reflections
4/23/21	From Students	Letters
4/23/21	Synchronous ZOOM Meeting	30 minute Zoom breakout rooms with mentor & mentees
4/24/21	Students	Reflections of Zoom meeting
4/30/21	From Mentors	Final letters
5/13/21	From Students	Final letters
5/15/21	Students	Final reflections

Participants

The participants included in this case study were Miss Johnson, her 19 fifth-grade students, and nine college basketball players. At the time of the study, Miss Johnson had six years of teaching experience in third and fifth grade. She has a master's degree in educational

psychology and described herself as having a particular interest in connecting children's literature to the socioemotional needs of her students.

The women's basketball team was composed of nine women between the ages of 18 and 22. Due to pandemic safety concerns, players had the opportunity to opt out for the basketball season, resulting in a lower number of players than usual. Three of the nine players had participated in the program for all three of the previous years, while two participated in just the year prior. Four players were new to the basketball program, and this was their first year in the mentorship. Two members of the team were enrolled in the university's elementary education program. The players' other majors included biology, nursing, criminal justice, and pre-med. Two players were English language learners from Sweden. Miss Johnson provided brief mentor descriptions found in Table 3.2. All the mentor names in Table 3.2 are pseudonyms.

Table 3.2

Mentor Pseudonyms with Descriptions

Pseudonym	Description Provided by Miss Johnson
Ashley	First year with the program. Pre-med biology major From Sweden.
Carrie	First year with the program. Undeclared major from Minnesota.
Connie	First year with the program. Criminal Justice major from Arizona.
Michelle	First year with the program. Pre-med biology major From Sweden.
Amy	Second year with the program. Biology major from Southeast Wisconsin.
Claire	Second year with the program. Elementary Education major from Northeast Illinois.
Regina	Third year with the program. Elementary education major from Southeast Wisconsin.
Trinity	Third year with the program. Nursing major from Southeast Wisconsin.
Ally	Third year with the program. Sport management major from Southeast Wisconsin

The team was paired with students from a diverse fifth-grade classroom from the same community as their university. Six students were white, five students were biracial, three were African American, two were Latino, and two were American Indian, having lived and attended school in India. Two of the fifth-grade students qualified for special education services and three students were English language learners. Out of the sixteen student participants, only two showed grade-level proficiencies on their most recent NWEA literacy assessment. Four students demonstrated literacy skills approaching proficiency while all others scored either below or significantly below grade level. Miss Johnson provided the individual student descriptions found in Table 3.3. All the names included with the descriptions are pseudonyms.

Table 3.3

Student Pseudonyms with Descriptions

Pseudonym	Description Provided by Miss Johnson
Becky	Becky was a confident and independent technology user. She described herself as anti-social and preferred communicating and socializing virtually. She had a moderate level of engagement during virtual learning but was often inhibited by distractions in her home environment. She was reluctant to return to in-person school and continued moderate levels of engagement in and completion of academic activities. She was more apt to participate in synchronous discussions when allowed to communicate digitally. She was very thoughtful when prompted with opportunities of reflection.
Terrance	Terrance was an American Indian student and English Language Learner who was technologically savvy. He showed high levels of engagement and demonstrated a strong work ethic across all academic areas throughout both virtual and in-person settings. He was a highly reluctant writer who preferred to participate verbally.
Brian	Brian was a highly engaged student throughout virtual learning and in-person. He demonstrated high levels of independence with technology and always completed any of his schoolwork confidently and quickly.
Laura	Laura was a reluctant writer who often needed support with use of technology. She had low levels of engagement in academic work in both virtual and in-person settings unless working with a small group.
Jared	Jared was absent for much of the school year, but highly engaged when present. He remained virtual for most of the year with many technological and home environment factors inhibiting his participation. He was a struggling reader and writer with a strong desire to engage and complete assignments correctly.

Table 3.3, continued

Pseudonym	Description Provided by Miss Johnson
Maddux	Maddux was an independent and confident technology user. He remained virtual for the entire year and fluctuated with assignment completion and attendance. He was a struggling writer who was reluctant to revisit assignments after completing a first draft.
Megan	Megan was a technologically savvy student who had minimal participation and work completion during virtual learning. She was highly engaged during in-person instruction. She was an English Language Learner with moderate levels of confidence in writing abilities but would often ask for support or suggestions.
Stephanie	Stephanie is an American Indian student and English Language Learner. She was highly engaged during both in-person instruction and virtual learning. Her home environment inhibited consistent attendance. She was comfortable and confident with technology-use, but a reluctant writer.
Julie	Julie was a moderately engaged student in both virtual and in-person settings. She was a confident technology user, but academic struggles often led to lower engagement and assignment completion. She was most comfortable in group work and with non-academic discussions.
Addison	Addison remained virtual the entire year with consistent attendance, but low engagement in academic work. She was confident with technology use, but not for academic purposes. She struggled to independently navigate the learning platform, complete assignments, and engage synchronously.
Shelly	Shelly was a confident technology user with minimal participation during virtual learning. She needed support to navigate the learning platforms but showed increased engagement and work completion when she returned to in-person instruction. She was a confident writer who sought out social connections.
Rachel	Rachel remained virtual the entire year with fluctuating attendance and participation. She was confident technologically, academically, and socially with high engagement and work completion when present.
Angel	Angel was a highly engaged student across all subject areas in both virtual and in-person settings. She was a confident writer with the ability to work independently with technology.
Charlie	Charlie was a moderately engaged student during virtual learning in most subject areas but was a highly motivated writer. He was confident with technology. His engagement in all subject areas increased during in-person instruction and he often vocalized his preference for writing.
Cesar	Cesar was a highly engaged student during both virtual and in-person settings. He demonstrated confidence and high interest in all subject areas and with technology use. He was a motivated writer but was reluctant to revise and edit work.
Isaiah	Isaiah was a highly engaged student who received special education services. He could independently navigate all digital learning platforms and demonstrated high levels of work completion. He was a reluctant writer who thrived when he was provided supports and models.

Miss Johnson and the nine mentors were sought for their participation in the study. Students were purposefully selected based on their level of participation using criteria sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For student participants to be included in this study they must have enrolled at the school for the entire time and completed at least 75% of the required exchanges. Setting this participation criteria ensured that the participants would have had sufficient exchanges for me to examine the interactivity of the messages. Based on these criteria, 16 of the 19 students were included in the study. Table 3.4 shows the sixteen students paired with their mentors.

Table 3.4

Mentors Paired with Students

Mentors	Fifth-Grade Mentee	Fifth-Grade Mentee
Amy	Becky	Terrance
Carrie	Brian	Laura
Connie	Jared	Maddux
Michelle	Megan	Stephanie
Regina	Julie	Addison
Ashley	Shelly	Rachel
Claire	Cesar	Isaiah
Trinity	Angel	
Ally	Charlie	

Data Collection

All data collection methods were Institutional Review Board approved (Appendix A) prior to the study. To study the partnership between the students and their college mentors I collected artifacts and conducted interviews. The main artifacts collected were the Google Slides correspondence and their Flipgrid videos. The participants' messages were organized chronologically by Miss Johnson into a single Google Slides presentation for each partnership. The Google Slides presentations included Miss Johnson's feedback provided to the students using the program's comment feature. The Flipgrid links to the videos were included within the Google Slides to allow for transcription within the context of the exchanges.

In addition to the correspondence between the students and mentors, additional artifacts were collected. Miss Johnson provided her instructions to the students and the mentors in PDF format. Additionally, she provided her students' reflections of the partnerships in Google Slides and Google Forms. Miss Johnson granted me access to all these artifacts in a shared Google Drive folder.

I conducted interviews with all adult participants and students who met the selection criteria for the study. A one-on-one interview was conducted with Miss Johnson (Appendix G) to ascertain her experiences organizing the virtual partnership and to gain an understanding of her perceived outcomes of the mentorship. Group interviews were conducted with the students (Appendix H) and the mentors (Appendix I). All interviews were conducted during May of the 2020/21 school year and the proximity to the end of the school year did not allow for the opportunity of follow up interviews. Table 3.5 shows the data sources aligned with each research question.

Table 3.5

Data Sources Aligned with Research Questions

Research Question	Data Source	Participants	Artifacts
How did Miss Johnson facilitate the virtual correspondence between her fifth-grade students and their college mentors?	Interview Artifacts	Facilitating Teacher	Audio Recording Teacher instructions to mentors Teacher feedback on students' Google Slides
What contributed to high levels of interactivity during written correspondence between the fifth-grade students and their college mentors?	Interviews Artifacts	16 Fifth-grade Students 9 University Basketball Players Facilitating Teacher	Recorded Zoom Meetings Google Slides Correspondence Student reflections
How did fifth-graders incorporate images with their written text to communicate virtually with their mentors?	Artifacts	16 Fifth-grade Students 9 University Basketball Players	Google Slides Correspondence

Data Collection Procedure

In May of the 2020/21 school year, Miss Johnson notified me that the mentorship was complete. At this time, I obtained school consent (see Appendix B) through the school principal. Miss Johnson then consented to the study (Appendix C) and helped to provide contact information for the students' families and the women's basketball team. I first sought adult consent from the mentors (Appendix C) and parents (Appendix D). I distributed the consent forms to the mentors in-person at a team practice. At this time, they had the opportunity to ask

me any questions they had regarding the study. Miss Johnson sent home the parental consent forms for her in-person students, and they were returned by them. I included my contact information with the consent forms to give them the opportunity to reach out with any questions. Once the in-person students returned their parental consent forms, I obtained student assent (Appendix E). At this time, they had the opportunity to ask me any questions they had regarding the study. To obtain parental consent and student assent of the remote students, Miss Johnson and I visited their homes which allowed those participants the opportunity to ask any questions they may have. I secured all signed consent and assent forms in a locked file drawer in my home office for safe keeping.

After I obtained all the participants' consent and assent, I conducted an initial interview with Miss Johnson (Appendix G). The interview occurred face-to-face at a mutually agreed upon time and location. The meeting with Miss Johnson lasted about an hour. I recorded the interview using a password protected recording device. Following the interview, I transcribed the recording verbatim except for replacing all participant identifiers with pseudonyms. I deleted the recording after I had completed the transcription. The digital transcription is stored on a password protected device. I printed a copy of the transcription to code the data more easily for analysis. Following analysis, I destroyed the printed copy.

Following Miss Johnson's interview, I conducted short, 15-minute student interviews (Appendix H) the third week of May. These interviews took place virtually in small groups of three or four students and were scheduled during the students' lunch time. I recorded the interviews on Google Meet. Following the interviews, I transcribed the recordings verbatim except I replaced all participant identifiers with pseudonyms. I stored the transcription on a

password protected device. I printed copies of the interview transcriptions to allow for coding and analysis. Following analysis, I destroyed the printed copies.

I conducted mentor interviews (Appendix I) the same week the student interviews were completed. The nine players were split into three groups of three. Each group interview was conducted over Zoom and lasted approximately twenty-five minutes. The interviews were scheduled at the players' convenience with the assistance of Miss Johnson. I recorded the interviews for analysis. Following the interviews, I transcribed the recordings verbatim except I replaced all participant identifiers with pseudonyms. I stored the transcripts on a password protected device. I deleted the recordings of the interviews.

At the conclusion of the program, Miss Johnson granted me access to the correspondence between her students and the players in Google Slides and Flipgrid. All the files were organized in a Google Drive folder and shared with me. She also shared her plans and reflections in this Google Drive folder. After removing all participant identifiers, I stored these digital files on a password protected device.

Data Analysis

In the following section I discuss how the data collected were analyzed. The methods of analysis were developed from Gee's (2011) *How to do a Discourse Analysis*. In his book, he outlines tools researchers can use when examining language in use. One of the tools he discusses is topic chaining. He writes,

> For any communication, ask what the topics are of all main clauses and how these topics are linked to each other to create (or not) a chain that creates an overall topic or coherent sense of being about something for a stretch of speech or writing. (pg. 143)

Topic chaining was at the heart of this analysis because it allowed me to apply Rafaeli's (1988) Theory of Interactivity to the correspondence. Analysis was also guided by Saldaña's (2009) *Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* where she outlines coding methods for consolidating and analyzing data. For analysis I used descriptive codes to both examine interview and reflection data and to track topic chains throughout the correspondence. This following section explains in more detail how each of the research questions was answered using this analysis.

Analysis for Research Question 1

In the following section I will explain how I analyzed the data for my first research question.

> Q1   How did Miss Johnson facilitate the virtual correspondence between her fifth-grade students and their college mentors?

To answer Research Question 1, I examined the data collected in the following three steps. First, I coded and examined Miss Johnson's interview and directions to gain insight into how she instructed her students to write for the mentorship. Next, I conducted a discourse analysis of the participants' correspondence to understand the impact of Miss Johnson's instructional decisions. Finally, I coded student and mentor interviews to triangulate the findings from Miss Johnson's interview and the discourse analysis. In the following section, I will explain these steps in more detail.

Analysis of Miss Johnson's Interview

To examine how Miss Johnson facilitated the partnership, I began with her interview which contained information regarding the context of the interactions, how she facilitated the partnership, and her perceived outcomes for her students. During the first read of her interview transcription, it became apparent there were differences between her writing instruction for the

mentorship and her typical classroom writing instruction. To understand these differences, I

applied descriptive codes to her interview to separate the two types of writing instruction as

either "classroom writing" or "mentorship writing." Next, I applied descriptive codes for the

different aspects of writing instruction for each category. Table 3.6 shows examples of the

passages coded in each of the terms.

Table 3.6

Initial Descriptive Coding of Miss Johnson's Interview

Code	Classroom Writing	Writing for the Mentorship
Audience for Writing	"For the students the alternative is sitting and writing in a notebook for me to look at and to grade."	"Where this was because it was somebody from the outside who's also bringing up new ideas or is a whole new person. The students are responding to that. I'm able to see and learn about my students in ways I don't think I could if they are just talking back and forth to me."
Purpose for Writing	"The model that I use in teaching writing is often them looking to my example, so I write one and they kind of try to replicate it in their own way aiming to fit the mold of a certain format."	"So creating kind of a more casual setting for them to write and a more engaging one because it's about themselves and getting to learn about somebody else."
Student Motivations	"That's often the most difficult if you have a student who is reluctant writing. It seems to be the one that's hardest to get them to overcome being reluctant."	"So, after many months of being in isolation and things like that so just being able to reach out to somebody new and get to know somebody new who had a genuine interest in them was something that led to their motivation to write."
Feedback	"I tell them this is good, but you need to add periods, or you need to capitalize your letters. Even the feedback I give comes across as just *hey you're a bad writer and like you need to fix this*."	"It's all positive feedback from the mentors to the students. Even if their letter was written horribly or they didn't write a lot."

I compared the coded passages for classroom writing with writing for the mentorship, for

each of the aspects of writing instruction, and found that Miss Johnson altered her instruction for

the mentorship in three ways. First, compared to her classroom writing instruction, she provided students with more freedom regarding the structure and content of their messages. Second, she provided students with instructions and feedback that was focused on communicating with their mentors and not writing mechanics. Finally, she made efforts to frame the mentors as the audience for the writing. With these actions Miss Johnson helped create the context for the students' interactions with their mentors. To understand the interactions that occurred within this context, I conducted a discourse analysis on the participants' virtual correspondence. This process will be explained in the following section.

Analysis of the Participants' Correspondence

Following analysis of Miss Johnson's interview and gaining insight into her instructional decisions, I began the discourse analysis to examine the interactions that took place in the context she created for the participants. I was specifically interested in the interactivity between the participants as it has been shown to lead to positive outcomes for the participants. Rafaeli (1988) writes, "interactivity in communication settings is associated with the attitudinal dimensions of acceptance and satisfaction. It is also related to performance quality, motivation, sense of fun, cognition, learning, openness, frankness and sociability." Rafaeli argued that the more interactive communication was, the more likely the participants would experience those positive outcomes.

To help differentiate the levels of interactive communication, Rafaeli developed a visual representation of the transfer between participants. Figure 2.2 shows the transfer of messages between participants in each of Rafaeli's (1988) three levels of interactivity. In his model, Rafaeli shows how messages travel between participants (P1 and P2) in three levels of communication. In one-way communication the messages only pass from a participant to an

audience. In two-way, P2 responds to the previous message. During interactive communication the messages travel back and forth between participants while taking into consideration previous messages. Rafaeli denotes the context the previous messages create by including them with the message. For example, as Participant 1 is communicating Message 3 (M3) to Participant 2 the first two messages (M2 and M1) are included to show the context created from the previous messages. The more interactive a communication is, the more positive outcomes of acceptance and motivation are seen in the participants (Rafaeli, 1988).

To gain understanding of the levels of interactive correspondence between the participants I separated the individual topics in the messages and trace them throughout the exchanges. This process will be explained next.

Topic Coding. To begin, I applied descriptive topic codes to all the exchanges (Saldaña, 2009). At this time, I also color coded the topics. The color choices were irrelevant to the analysis but helped me to visualize the progression of topics through the messages. Table 3.7 shows the topics coded, their description, and the color applied to the messages.

Table 3.7

Topic Codes for the Correspondence Between the Fifth-Grade Students and Their Mentors

Code	Description of Topic	Color Code
Family/Pets	Topics involving family members, activities with families, or pets.	Yellow
Favorites	Questions and responses asking about specific favorite things, people, places, etc.	Green
Hobbies	Topics about what individuals enjoy doing with their time such as drawing, riding bikes, and video games.	Blue
Life Updates	Topics about what has been going on in their lives. This does not include schooling which was a separate code.	Orange
Women's Basketball	These are topics specifically about the mentor's basketball team. Discussions involving basketball in general were included with hobbies.	Red
Holidays	Holidays that occurred within the timeframe of the exchanges were Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Years, and Easter. This category of codes may include activities, gifts, and food related to the holiday.	Purple
Fun Facts	Questions and responses about interesting information about themselves such as birthdays, greatest fear, or superpower wanted.	Magenta
School/College	Topics about elementary school or college including discussions involving classwork, class activities, and feelings towards school.	Grey
Goals	Topics about things they want to accomplish in the future such as career goals.	Pink
Greetings/ Closings	Phrases such as hi, talk to you later, sincerely etc.	White

Topic Tracking. After topic coding the exchanges, I conducted a second round of coding to track how the topics progressed through the messages. I applied conversation codes to the topic strands. M and S were used to represent who wrote the message, the mentor or student.

Statements were either coded as an O for offered information or an R if the statement was in response to a question. Questions were coded as either IQ for a question that initiated a new topic or a FQ for a follow-up question for a topic already discussed. These codes, found in Table 3.8 were used to track the ways a topic continued during the correspondence.

Table 3.8

Conversation Codes for Tracking How Topics Progressed During Correspondence

Code	Description
MO	Mentor Offered Information
SO	Student Offered Information
MIQ	Mentor Initial Question
SIQ	Student Initial Question
MFQ	Mentor Follow-up Question
SFQ	Students Follow-up Question
MR	Mentor Response to Question
SR	Student Response to Question
MIQ and O	Mentor Question and Offered Information
SIQ and O	Student Question and Offered Information

An example of a participant initiating a topic by both asking and answering their own question would be, *what do you hope to get for Christmas? I am really hoping I get a new phone.* Figure 3.1 shows an example of a participant's message following the two rounds of coding.

Figure 3.1

Example of a Message with Topic and Conversation Codes

Levels of Interactivity. After the messages were coded with their topic and conversation codes, I was able to separate the topics and apply Rafaeli's Theory of Interactivity (1988) to determine how interactive each topic became. Topics that were discussed by one participant and not responded to by the other were categorized as one-way communication. Topics that received a single response or topics in which the participant responded to the question and mirrored the same question back were categorized as reactive communication. Finally, topics that were expanded over more than two messages were categorized as interactive communication. Table 3.9 shows an example of tracking the interactive topic of basketball between two participants. While the topic of basketball evolves to include basketball experience, favorite basketball players, and basketball goals, it is all coded as the topic of basketball to track the development of the original topic.

Table 3.9

Example of Interactive Communication

Participant	Text Regarding Basketball
Message 1 - Connie (Mentor)	The position that I play is like a 1 2. Like a point guard/shooting guard.
Message 2 - Jared (Student)	i play basketball to just like you. how long have you played basketball i played since i was like 5 now im 10
Message 3 - Connie (Mentor)	that is so cool that you play basketball! I have been playing basketball since I was 5 too! Who is your favorite basketball player?
Message 4 - Jared (Student)	my dream is to be a nba player i want to play for goldan states. my favorite basketball player is curry liceskin land im liceskin. I know you new to the team how is it going?
Message 5 - Connie (Mentor)	I see you're dream is to be in the NBA that is amazing I hope you work hard and push yourself! You will go through ups and downs but the game is mental and you can do it! I believe in you! Don't let anything get in your way!! I see you want to play for Golden State what number do you want? I am a big Lakers fan but Curry is good too. Curry is light skin like you make me laugh lol. I am new to the team and it's cool we are 0-2 but we will get better!! It's only the beginning!

After separating topics by their levels of interactivity, I was able to calculate frequency data such as the number of messages topics were discussed, who initiated the topics, and who asked questions. With this information I was able to search for patterns across all partnerships. Once I understood the context for the correspondence and the interactions that took place within this context, I next examined how Miss Johnson's written feedback influenced the interactions.

Analysis of Miss Johnson's Feedback

Miss Johnson gave students feedback through her written comments made on the students' messages created in Google Slides. Analysis of Miss Johnson's written feedback to the students found she made 47 comments on her students' 92 Google Slides. I applied codes to Miss Johnson's feedback describing the support the comments provided her students. From these codes four categories of feedback were developed; specific topic suggestions, requiring more questions, highlighting questions not answered, and seeking clarification.

Using the history feature on Google Slides I was able to see the students' messages before and after Miss Johnson's feedback. This information, along with the topic tracking from the participants' correspondence, allowed me to align her suggestions with the topics being discussed to explore their influence on the correspondence. Figure 3.2 shows an example of a student's message before and after Miss Johnson's feedback.

Figure 3.2

Example of a Student's Message Before and After Miss Johnson's Feedback

> More questions about her please!
>
> Dear Ally,
>
> .It's an honor for you to be my mentor. My name is Charlie and I was a mascot for my school and my basketball team. I am 11 years old and my favorite sport is wrestling and my hobbies are going to school,games and watching wrestling and youtube. And that's most of the stuff about me.
>   Sincerely,
>
> Charlie

> Dear Ally,
>
> .It's an honor for you to be my mentor. My name is Charlie and I was a mascot for my school and my basketball team. I am 11 years old and my favorite sport is wrestling and my hobbies are going to school,games and watching wrestling and youtube. And that's most of the stuff about me. Do you like virtual school because I love virtual school because we get off really earlier than in-school school. Do you miss new berland? Because I really miss my grandpa in indiana ANd I don't see him that much but most of my family is in wisconsin. Do u have a pet because i do it's a dog and her name is daisy. I enjoyed writing this letter to you I'm excited to see you see you soon! :D
>
> Sincerely,
>
> Charlie

Coding Student and Mentor Interviews

Student and mentor interviews and reflections were coded using terms relevant to the findings from Miss Johnsons' analysis. These terms included role of audience, motivation, topic choice, and classroom writing. The passages coded in these terms were used in Chapter 4 to incorporate the participants' voice and experiences with the findings.

An additional round of coding was done on the mentors' interview to ascertain their perceived role during the correspondence. Descriptive codes were applied to quotes from the mentors' interview in which they discussed their role, motivations, and considerations during the mentorship. These passages were incorporated to triangulate the findings regarding student motivations and topic choice for the interactions.

Analysis for Research Question 2

In the following section I will explain how I analyzed the data for my second research question.

Q2   What contributed to high levels of interactive communication during written correspondence between the fifth-grade students and their college mentors?

Research Question 2 was again answered by applying Rafaeli's (1988) Model of Interactivity. As I previously discussed, Rafaeli posits that the more interactive a communication is, the more positive outcomes such as acceptance, satisfaction, and motivation are experienced by the participants (Rafaeli & Sudweeks, 2006). These outcomes aligned with Miss Johnson's aims for socio-emotional support and motivation to write.

To apply Rafaeli's theory to the correspondence between the students and their mentors. I used the topic coding and tracking from Research Question 1 to determine the number of messages each topic was discussed. Because Research Question 2 is concerned with interactive communication, I disregarded the topics that were only found in one or two slides as those would be considered one way or reactive communication in Rafaeli's model. This allowed me to only focus on the interactive topics from the correspondence.

Looking only at the topics that were discussed for more than two messages, I was able to tabulate the frequency of characteristics of the interactive correspondence such as how each topic was initiated, and how participants continued the discussion of the topics. With the information tabulated from the analysis of the interactive topics I was able to search for patterns to help understand what contributes to interactive correspondence.

Topic Diagraming

In comparison to face-to-face interactions which typically involves more frequent opportunities for participants to exchange messages, the letter format of the mentorship allowed

66

for the participants to discuss several topics simultaneously. As was shown in the example for

Research Question 1, when the participants discussed the topic of basketball, they discussed

several topics simultaneously involving basketball. To separate these topics, I conducted a

second round of topic coding on the topics discussed for the greatest number of messages from

each of the partnerships. After this second round of topic coding, I created topic diagrams

modeled after Rafaeli's representation found in Figure 2.2. While the topic diagrams contain

similar information gleaned from the topic and conversation codes, they created a visual

representation of the progression of the topics throughout the correspondence. Figure 3.3 shows

the example correspondence from Research Question 1 as a topic diagram.

Figure 3.3

Example of Tracking Multiple Topic Strands Regarding Basketball
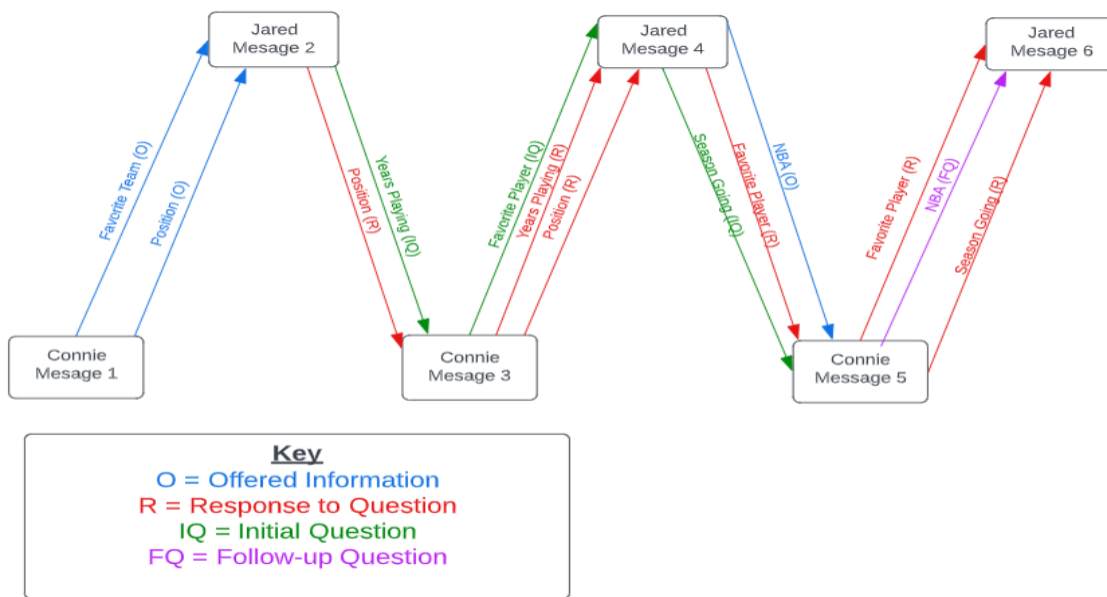
The lines show the topic's direction between the participants throughout the course of the

exchange. While the diagram is of a singular topic, basketball, multiple subtopics within the

same message are represented with the multiple strands between the participants. Rafaeli denoted

the continuity of the messages in interactive communication with an M1, M2, M3. Diagramming the topics provided a way to visualize the continual discussion of topics.

Each of the four conversational codes are color coded. Blue and green represent topics that are being initiated while red and purple represent the responses to an initiated topic with a response and/or a follow-up question. The multiple strands and color coding of the topic diagrams were used to visually show the different levels of interactivity in the correspondence between the participants.

Calculating Percentage Topic was Discussed

Examining the topic discussed for the greatest number of slides allowed me to calculate the percentage of the correspondence that the topic was discussed. To calculate this percentage, I found the overall word count of the messages using the word count feature on Google Slides. I then found the word count of the topic and calculated the percentage the topic was discussed compared to the overall message. This percentage was used to show the growth of topics as they continued throughout the correspondence.

Coding for Participant Affinity

Comparing the transcripts of the partnerships with topics discussed for the most slides with the partnerships with topics discussed for the least number of slides revealed that the participants' affinity for the topic influenced the length of the correspondence. The participants' affinity for a topic was determined through coding of the participants' messages, interviews, and reflections. Phrases in students' messages such as "my dream is to be an NBA player" or "my favorite thing to do is play Roblox" signaled an affinity for that topic. In addition to the students' messages, their reflections were also used to determine their affinity for a topic. When asked what they were excited to share with their mentors Brian replied, "I was excited to tell her that I

have a leopard gecko and about my dogs." Charlie wrote, "I was excited to share about my drawings so I can show how greatly i can draw." Terrance replied, "I showed my mentor my coloring skills and she likes them." These reflections helped to triangulate the affinity codes found in the correspondence.

When neither participant had a special affinity for the topic being discussed, their interactions involved topics that could generally be shared by anyone, such as school and holidays. When these students were asked what they were excited to share with their mentors they replied with a broad response. For example, Shelly replied, "I was excited to share what I've been up to lately." Stephanie wrote, "I was excited to share about what I do." Cesar responded, "I was excited to tell her what i was doing because then she would know like what type of person that I am."

Coding topics by the participants' affinity towards the topic revealed three types of relationships the participants had to the topic; both participants had a shared affinity, only one participant had an affinity, or neither participant did. Developing these three categories allowed me to compare the topic-chaining and questioning patterns found within each.

Analysis for Research Question 3

In the following section I will explain how I analyzed the data for my third research question.

> Q3 How did fifth-graders incorporate images with their written text to communicate virtually with their mentors?

I used Marsh and White's Taxonomy of Image and Text Relationships (2003) to analyze the students' images included in their messages to their mentors. Marsh and White created their taxonomy by synthesizing 24 studies on text and image relationships. I used their taxonomy to analyze the students' images because of the comprehensiveness of the functions included.

Marsh and White's Taxonomy is broken up into two stages. The first stage categorizes the image by its relationship to the text. The image can either have little relationship to the text, close relation to the text, or go beyond the text. The second stage of their taxonomy breaks down those three categories into 49 functions the image can have with the text. Marsh and White's full Taxonomy of Image and Text Relationships can be found in Figure 3.4.

Figure 3.4

Marsh and White's Taxonomy of Image and Text Relationships (2003)

A Functions expressing little relation to the text	B Functions expressing close relation to the text	C Functions that go beyond the text
A1 Decorate	*B1 Reiterate*	*C1 Interpret*
A1.1 Change pace	B1.1 Concretize	C1.1 Emphasize
A1.2 Match style	B1.1.1 Sample	C1.2 Document
A2 Elicit emotion	B1.1.1.1 Author/Source	*C2 Develop*
A2.1 Alienate	B1.2 Humanize	C2.1 Compare
A2.2 Express poetically	B1.3 Common referent	C2.2 Contrast
A3 Control	B1.4 Describe	*C3 Transform*
A3.1 Engage	B1.5 Graph	C3.1 Alternate progress
A3.2 Motivate	B1.6 Exemplify	C3.2 Model
	B1.7 Translate	C3.2.1 Model cognitive process
	B2 Organize	C3.2.2 Model physical process
	B2.1 Isolate	C3.3 Inspire
	B2.2 Contain	
	B2.3 Locate	
	B2.4 Induce perspective	
	B3 Relate	
	B3.1 Compare	
	B3.2 Contrast	
	B3.3 Parallel	
	B4 Condense	
	B4.1 Concentrate	
	B4.2 Compact	
	B5 Explain	
	B5.1 Define	
	B5.2 Complement	

I applied Marsh and White's taxonomy to the students' images by first determining what part of the written message was associated with each image. Coding topics, as discussed in the previous section, showed that each of the students' messages to their mentors covered a multitude of topics. While students had the ability to add multiple images to each message, most of the time they added a singular image. In the eight occurrences of adding multiple images to a

message, all of them were related to the same topic. Because the images included with the messages referred to a single topic, only the text that referred to the same topic as the image was used to determine the image and text relationship.

Once I isolated the text that was associated with the image or images on the slide, I was able to categorize the images by their relationship to the text. All the images either had little relationship to the text or a close relationship to the text. None of the images went beyond the text according to the taxonomy. Next, I coded the images by the functions found in Figure 3.4. Examination of the frequency of the functions of the images led to the findings regarding how students incorporated images with their messages.

Trustworthiness

Several procedural considerations were made to increase the credibility of the qualitative findings. Data collection procedures followed prescribed case study methods (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2003) and were reviewed by experienced researchers at the University of Northern Colorado prior to the study. Researchers on the review committee were selected for their expertise in the areas of literacy and language. Their input was sought throughout the conception, analysis, and writeup of the study.

I included multiple data sources that helped ensure data source triangulation of the findings. Multiple data sources allowed me to provide rich descriptions of the interactions that occurred between the participants. Following data analysis, a member check with Miss Johnson was used to check my interpretation of the data. "Member checks are the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what the participants say and do" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 246). Miss Johnson reviewed my analysis of the virtual

interactions. Her intimate knowledge of the individuals and the context for the communication ensured that my interpretation of the interactions was accurate.

External validity is the extent to which the case study can be generalized beyond the specific case. To help increase the external validity of a case study that is unique in its context, findings connected to existing theories on communication. The study also includes detailed descriptions of the interactions and their contexts to allow readers to determine the extent to which comparisons can be made to their educational situation. As Eliot Eisner states in his book *The Enlightened Eye* (1991), "One of the most useful of human abilities is the ability to learn from the experience of others" (p. 202).

Ethical Considerations

The study of the virtual communication did not bring harm to the participants. Every precaution was taken to ensure that all participants felt safe, comfortable, and had the freedom to withdraw from the study if they felt the need to. Extra precautions were taken when collecting data from the young students. The students were familiar with me as an educator and were comfortable interacting with me as a researcher.

Online interactions bring about additional ethical concerns regarding the identities of the participants (Curwood et al., 2019). Protecting the anonymity of the participants was critical for their well-being. All identifiers were replaced with pseudonyms immediately following data collection to conceal the real and virtual identities of the participants.

Researchers' Stance

I have a close personal and professional relationship with the facilitating teacher. We met while teaching, and since then we have sought out opportunities to teach in the same building. We often discuss our work in our classrooms with each other. While I hadn't assisted in her work

developing the university partnership, I was aware of the work she had done during the first three years of the partnership. During the last year that the mentors and students were able to meet in person, I was able to be in the same school where the partnership occurred and observed some of the interactions between the players and students. I have met the coaches of the team and am familiar with their perceptions of the partnership. All my experiences with the previous participants have led me to believe this is a very beneficial partnership. It was my hope to understand more about this partnership through my research. The final write-up will in no way be used to benefit the participants of this study.

The facilitating teacher and I were the only two fifth-grade teachers at the elementary school. We collaborated regularly and co-planned the fifth-grade curriculum. Although I was close to the facilitator and the case at the time of the study, I did not attempt to alter the study in any way. Her students worked on their virtual interactions with their mentors while my students did alternative activities. To ensure minimal researcher interference, I did not contact any of the participants until after the correspondence ended.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

In the following chapter, I present the findings from the qualitative analysis of the case

study into the virtual correspondence between Miss Johnson's fifth-grade students and their

college mentors. My aim in this chapter is to tell a detailed story of the correspondence that

considers the context of the interactions and that connects the findings to the experiences of the

participants. I present the findings using the participants' words from their interviews and their

correspondence to give a rich description of the partnership between the students and their

mentors. Quantitative data, such as the frequency of patterns discovered, is used to support the

themes found. The goal of this qualitative research was to understand the experiences of the

participants during their virtual interactions. These experiences can help educators develop

communicative literacy experiences for their students.

Research Question 1

The following section will present the findings from my analysis of data regarding my

first research question.

Q1   How did Miss Johnson facilitate the virtual correspondence between her fifth-
        grade students and their college mentors?

Analysis of data as outlined in Chapter 3 led to the following two findings pertinent to Research

Question 1.

Finding 1   Miss Johnson motivated her students to write by framing the mentors as the audience and allowing freedom in the content of the messages.

Finding 2   Miss Johnson's conversational supports helped students develop reactive correspondence.

To present these two findings, I will first describe Miss Johnson's aims for the mentorship and the changes she made to her regular classroom writing instruction to meet those aims. After describing her actions which created the context for the correspondence, I will present the two findings related to Research Question 1 while showing the influence Miss Johnson's actions had on the students' writing for the mentorship.

Miss Johnson's Aims for the Correspondence

In her interview, Miss Johnson stated the purpose of the mentorship was to get her students socioemotional support during the isolation caused by quarantines and to serve as a motivation for students' writing. These two purposes for her facilitation of the partnership will be discussed in the following section.

Interactions During Covid-19

Miss Johnson facilitated the virtual correspondence between her students and their mentors during the Covid-19 pandemic. Her school district closed their buildings in March of 2020, and all students were sent home. They remained home until March of 2021, a full calendar year, attending school virtually. Miss Johnson expressed socioemotional concerns for her students during this time. "For the majority of the year [my students] were stuck at home with only whoever was in their household and me and their virtual classmates to speak with." She added, "Everybody was going through something different at home surviving the pandemic. One kid shared with me he hadn't seen another kid outside of his family in a year."

Typically, Miss Johnson would address any socioemotional needs of her students by building a supportive classroom community. But due to virtual learning, she was not able to successfully do this with her students. She shared, "The classroom community was almost impossible to build because kids aren't there, or normally outspoken students are shy on the microphone."

Instead of developing a classroom community, Miss Johnson addressed her students' socioemotional needs by promoting virtual correspondence with their mentors. Miss Johnson mentioned her main goal was "to develop genuine relationships" with the mentors to meet the socioemotional needs of her students. She said, "After many months of being in isolation, just being able to reach out to somebody new and get to know somebody new, who had a genuine interest in them, was something I thought would be very beneficial to them."

Miss Johnson thought interacting with the mentors was important because they were positive role models from which the students could learn from their experiences. She mentioned, "Many of my students don't know anyone who has gone to college." She added, "I think that one of the greatest needs in schools is to have more adults and more positive role models working with kids." Miss Johnson particularly thought athletes serve as appropriate role models for her students. She said, "We idolize athletes and put them on a higher pedestal. I think that's great, but there also needs to be something like that for good. They need to be using their platform to do something that is genuinely good."

Motivation for Writing

Miss Johnson also wanted to use the mentorship to motivate students to write for an outside audience. She mentioned, "That's why I wanted to focus on writing back and forth instead of Zoom meetings. I wanted the students to get more experience writing." Miss Johnson

discussed during her interview that a big challenge during virtual learning was to get students to engage in academic tasks, especially writing. She said, "The biggest difficulty during virtual learning was engaging kids into putting effort into their writing assignments, like getting them to genuinely care about the assignments."

This challenge was not unique to virtual learning. She continued, "Every year writing is the biggest challenge. There is such a big difference between what the students can do and what the grade level expectations are." She attributed students' lack of effort in their writing assignments to a lack of confidence as writers. She mentioned, "When I'm saying you're writing an informational essay, they shut down because they think it's something they can't do."

Miss Johnson's Typical Writing Instruction. Miss Johnson's typical classroom writing instruction was guided by a district-mandated writing curriculum approved by the district school board. Miss Johnson's writing curriculum was divided into three genres: narrative, informational, and persuasive. Each genre was broken down into components on rubrics that Miss Johnson gave to students in the form of checklists. Figure 4.1 shows an example of the rubric for the informational genre Miss Johnson used for her classroom writing.

Figure 4.1

Rubric Used by Miss Johnson During Writing Instruction for the Informational Genre

Name: _____ Date: _____

Informative/Explanatory Writing Checklist: Grade 5

		I write Informative/Explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.		
		How is my Informative/Explanatory writing? Did I write like a fifth grader?	**YES**	**NO**
Writing Structure & Organization	Introduction	I introduced my topic in an engaging way. I included the main idea about the topic with a clear focus.	☐	☐
	Organization	I grouped information logically into paragraphs and/or sections. Each section had information that was about the same thing.	☐	☐
		I used headings and I may have used subheadings.	☐	☐
		I used illustrations, multi-media, diagrams, charts, bold words, or definition boxes to help teach my readers.	☐	☐
	Transitions	I used transition words in each section that help readers understand how one piece of information connected with others. If I wrote the section in sequence, I used words and phrases such as *before, later, next, then,* and *after.* If I organized the section in kinds or parts, I used words such as *another, also,* and *for example.*	☐	☐
	Conclusion	I wrote a conclusion in which I restated the main points and may have offered a final thought or question for readers to consider.	☐	☐
Development & Elaboration of Ideas	Elaboration	I developed the topic with different kinds of facts and concrete details such as numbers, names, and examples.	☐	☐
		I further developed my topic using definitions, quotations, or other information and examples related to the topic.	☐	☐
		I might have used compare/contrast, cause/effect, or pro/con to help teach my readers.	☐	☐
	Task Focus	My whole piece stays focused on my task or prompt.	☐	☐
	Research	I used information from a variety of sources to support my topic.	☐	☐
Language Conventions & Word Choice	Vocabulary	I used precise words and the vocabulary of experts to inform about or explain the topic.	☐	☐
	Grammar	I used strong words, phrases, and clauses correctly to bring my writing to life.	☐	☐
	Punctuation	Before I wrote my final draft I checked to make sure I used punctuation correctly (capitalization, commas, quotations, italics, underlining, etc.)	☐	☐
	Spelling	Before I wrote my final draft I checked to make sure all my words were spelled correctly or I used resources to help me spell words I wasn't sure about.	☐	☐
	Sentence Fluency	I used complete sentences. I used different kinds of sentences to make my writing interesting and to draw my reader in.	☐	☐

Miss Johnson described her typical classroom writing instruction. She said, "Normally I just pick something from the rubric and make that the target for the day. Then I [demonstrate] writing it or point it out in an essay already written." During independent work time, students then use her instruction to develop their own ideas and try to replicate her model text. Miss Johnson added, "When the students are done, I give them feedback using the rubric and if there is still time, they write another essay hopefully using my feedback."

Comparing Miss Johnson's Classroom
and Mentorship Writing Instruction
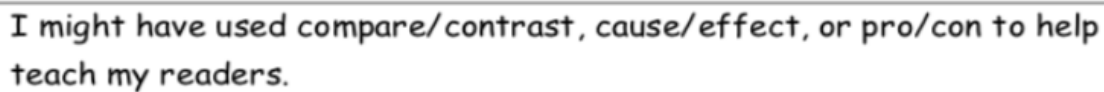
Analysis of Miss Johnson's interview, instructions, and feedback found she differed her instruction for the mentorship from that of her typical classroom writing instruction in three ways. She framed the mentors as the audience for the writing. She allowed for student choice regarding the messages' structure and content, and she provided feedback supporting interactions. The following section will explore these differences in more depth.

Miss Johnson Framed the Mentors
as the Audience

In the district rubrics for genre writing, like the one found in Figure 4.1, the audience for the students' writing was presented as an ambiguous "reader/readers" of the finished writing product. Figure 4.2 shows an example from the rubric discussing the audience for the writing.

Figure 4.2

Example of Genre Rubric Discussing the Audience for Writing

> I might have used compare/contrast, cause/effect, or pro/con to help teach my readers.

Miss Johnson stated that the audience played a minor role in the students' classroom writing instruction, and in reality, she was the only audience for her students' writing pieces. She mentioned in her interview that students typically "write in a notebook for me to grade."

When her students wrote to the mentors, Miss Johnson made efforts to remove herself as the audience for the letters. She said, "I didn't always make it known that I was reading them word for word," and "I tried not reading them in front of them." This was done to show respect for the students' privacy in their correspondence as well as to strengthen the mentor's role as the audience for the letters. She said, "I think they were able to speak freely and were able to develop a relationship as if it were just them and their mentor going back and forth."

79

Miss Johnson Allowed Choice with Structure
and Content

Miss Johnson described her efforts "creating a more casual setting for writing where students could just focus on writing to their mentors." Part of this effort was to not provide an example for students to replicate as she did during her typical genre writing instruction. She said, "With the mentors, especially toward the end of the year, they had the ability to design their own Google Slide, which is what they wrote on. It was pretty much free game."

Writing Checklists for the Mentorship. Like the writing rubrics (Figure 4.1) for genre writing, Miss Johnson provided students with a writing checklist for the mentorship. Figure 4.3 shows the checklists provided by Miss Johnson for her students during their correspondence with their mentors. The checklist on the left was used for all the students' first five letters. The checklist on the right shows the modified checklist for the students' final letter. This checklist, for the last exchange, replaced the criteria of asking three questions and offering something new to the discussion with thanking the mentors and naming two positives. This was done because it was the final exchange for the mentorship, and the students would not be receiving a response back from their mentors.

Figure 4.3

Checklists Posted to Google Classroom with Writing Expectations

Compared to the district rubric, which has a section dedicated to writing structure and organization, Miss Johnson did not provide any suggestions regarding the structure of the letters to the mentors. Instead, her checklists for the mentorship focused on interacting with their mentors. All the checklists' components guided the students to consider their mentors in their writing. In the checklist for the letters in which the students were expecting a response, the first and second items simply involve answering and asking questions. The third item asked students to offer something new to the discussion, and the final item asked them to close out their letter. In addition to the checklists, Miss Johnson reinforced her expectations with her feedback provided to students.

Miss Johnson's Feedback Supported Interactions

Another change Miss Johnson made during the mentorship was how she used her feedback to scaffold her students' writing. During her typical classroom writing instruction, Miss Johnson felt compelled to make corrections regarding writing mechanics according to curriculum rubrics and grade-level standards. She said, "I know it's my role to be the one to teach them

specific standards, or general mechanics." She goes on to describe her use of feedback regarding writing mechanics for genre writing compared to the mentorship.

> I often err on the side of being more positive than critical, but I need to be the one to tell them to add periods or capitalize their letters. For their letters, there's absolutely none of that type of feedback. It's all positive, even if their letter was written horribly.

For the students' writing to their mentors, Miss Johnson purposefully disregarded critical feedback in favor of focusing on supporting her student's interactions with their mentors. The types of feedback she gave to her students will be discussed next.

Types of Feedback During Mentorship. While Miss Johnson made efforts to frame the mentors as the audience for the writing, she did leave comments on some of the messages to support her students. Table 4.1 shows the frequency of the type of feedback left by Miss Johnson on her students' messages.

Table 4.1

Frequency of Miss Johnson's Written Feedback to her Students

Type of Feedback	Occurrences	Percentage of Written Comments
Specific topic suggestions	23	48.9%
Reminding of Expectations	13	27.7%
Highlighting questions not answered	8	17.1%
Seeking Clarification	3	6.3%

Besides for the comments seeking clarification, the three main categories were reiterations of Miss Johnson's writing checklist she provided the students. Nearly half of the comments made by Miss Johnson suggested topics to write about. This feedback helped to support students for the third item on the checklist for the mentorship; add something new to the discussion. Closer examination found patterns in her topic suggestions. In her students'

December exchanges, four of her eight topic suggestions recommended talking about holiday plans. Similarities in topic suggestions can also be found in the January exchange where she recommended that multiple students ask about basketball, and in the April exchange she recommended talking about what the students did over spring break. Other topic suggestions were made based on what she knew about her students. For example, she wrote on Stephanie's first message, "Maybe after you share something, you can ask her about that. Like I am from Punjabi. What do you like about being from another country too?"

The second most frequent type of feedback was pointing out the writing expectations the students missed from her instructions. For example, she commented on Becky's first message, "Try and share 3 facts about you and ask her two more questions." This comment would be pointing out that Becky did not satisfy the expectations of the second and third items from her writing checklist. The third most frequent type of feedback was like the previous type in that it pointed out the questions that the students did not answer from their mentor, which was the first item on her writing checklist. It differed in that in addition to the comment Miss Johnson highlighted questions the mentors asked that students didn't respond to from the previous message. For the eight occurrences of this type of feedback she would let the student know they missed questions and would go back to the mentors' previous message and using the highlighter tool on Google Slides highlight the questions that were not answered by the students.

Summary of Miss Johnson's Facilitation
of the Mentorship

Miss Johnson made efforts to frame the mentors as the audience for the students' messages. She allowed for student choice with regards to the structure and content of their messages. She did this by not providing her students with an exemplar and by giving instructions that focused on interactions with the mentors. She used her feedback to provide conversational

83

support for her students by suggesting topics, requiring questions, and highlighting questions not answered. There were zero occurrences of Miss Johnson commenting on the structure or mechanics of the students' writing. Table 4.2 shows the summary of Miss Johnson's aims and her changes from her typical writing instruction.

Table 4.2

Changes Miss Johnson Made Facilitating Writing for the Mentorship

Miss Johnson's Aim of Correspondence	**Changes From Typical Writing Instruction**		
Promote interactions for socioemotional support and motivation to write during Covid-19 pandemic	Provide students freedom regarding structure and content	Feedback focused on communication and not writing mechanics	Frame mentors as the audience for the writing.

The following sections will discuss two findings related to how these instructional decisions influenced her students' writing.

Finding 1: Miss Johnson Motivated her Students to Write by Framing the Mentors as the Audience and Allowing Freedom in the Content of the Messages

As discussed, Miss Johnson made efforts to frame the mentors as the audience for the messages and gave freedom regarding the content of the messages. These decisions helped to increase the motivation for her students to write for the mentorship. Miss Johnson noted that more students participated when writing to their mentors compared to other classroom assignments. She said, "most kids turned in work when it had to do with their mentor mail, more than they did with any other writing assignment." Analysis found the fifth-grade students were motivated to get to know someone new during the isolation caused by Covid-19 quarantines. The students were also motivated to create messages their mentors could comprehend. In addition to that, the students were motivated to communicate with their mentors about topics of their

choosing. The following section will examine these three sources of motivation for the students to correspond with their mentors.

Motivation to Interact During Quarantines

Topic analysis of the correspondence showed the prevalence of being in quarantines during their discussions. In her first message to her mentor Ashley, Rachel wrote,

Speaking about boring online school is soooo boring i like ms. johnson as a teacher but I hate looking at a screen all day, What do you think about online school? Although you have one in person class I have zero! Your lucky you even get to see people I don't even get to see my friends in my neighborhood but we try to make it the best we can.

Rachel's feelings during the Covid-19 quarantines were not unique. Not a single student spoke positively of their experience of virtual schooling from home. Like Rachel, many commented on the isolation they felt not being able to see their classmates. Shelly wrote to her mentor, "I don't get to meet new people I'm always around the same people." Charlie wrote to his mentor Ally, "I miss interacting with my friends too covid-19 is the worst."

All student participants commented during their interviews about their excitement to talk to someone new during the mentorship. When asked about their favorite part of having a mentor Angel replied, "We actually got to talk to somebody at home. When we first started it we were all at home cooped up on the computers." Cesar followed-up Angel's reply saying, "We were all at home cooped up in our houses on the computers, and it was nice to actually get to talk to somebody new." In her group interview, Becky responded, "You have someone to talk to during this pandemic." The idea of talking to someone during the quarantine was a consistent theme amongst the students during their interviews.

The students also talked about the excitement of talking to someone new during their reflections. Eight of the twelve students who completed their April 12th reflection mentioned that the biggest positive of the mentorship was getting to talk to someone new. Brian wrote, "It's nice to talk about things with someone that's not a family member." Shelly wrote, "It has been fun! You get to know someone and make a new friend."

Mentors' Role to Stay Positive. The mentors felt it was their role to be positive during the Covid-19 quarantines. Amy said, "I mean you don't want to say something that might upset them or make them sad. You try and stay in the happy and light areas." Michelle added, "Me and my pen pal talked about what we were looking forward to do, because it was such a stressful year. I tried to emphasize the positive like looking forward to stuff." In her interview Trinity also described staying positive during Covid. She said, "I was hesitant to ask about friends and stuff because I didn't know if they're able to build those relationships this year and I didn't want to make them feel bad about it." During her interview Ashley also said that the quarantines were a big topic and how she "always tried to stay positive and help talk them through things."

Importance of Mentors When Students Returned to School. The context for the correspondence shifted when many of the students returned to the classroom for in-person instruction in March of the school year. For a few students, returning to school caused a shift in their view of the importance of the correspondence. When I asked *when you got back to school was it less important because you had more people to talk to?* Cesar responded, "It wasn't that important when you came to school because there's more people to talk to besides family." Isaiah replied, "I like talking to my friends more when we came back to school."

Most students maintained their excitement for corresponding when they returned for in-person instruction. Brian said, "It's really fun talking to someone new instead of talking to the

people you see every day." When asked if she liked writing more to her mentor or to Miss Johnson, Julie replied, "I like writing to my mentor because I see Miss Johnson every day." When Angel was asked about what is different about writing to Miss Johnson she replied, "Why would we write to her? We can always just talk to her." Angel's quote points to the importance of an authentic audience from outside the classroom when writing for communicative purposes.

Motivation From Communicative Accountability

Students were motivated by their need to make sure the mentors could understand their messages. Although Miss Johnson did not make corrections or provide feedback on her students' writing mechanics, four students commented on their desire to have well-written letters for their mentors. When the students were asked to reflect about what was different about writing to their mentors versus Miss Johnson Brian wrote,

> I was nervous when I wrote to the mentor because I didn't know if they were going to understand what I said. I know that [Miss Johnson] is going to just tell me if I am right or wrong because [she] has to.

Similarly, Angel wrote in her reflection, "i am also nervous that they might not know what i wrote." When asked to reflect about what they thought about when they wrote to their mentors Shelly responded, "All I care about is what it says and what I'm trying to say instead of how it looks." Cesar responded to the same question with, "I at least wanted it so that she was able to read it."

Brian's comment regarding Miss Johnson simply telling him if he is right or wrong, points to a lack of caring if his genre writing had proper mechanics because he will simply get them corrected. The other comments by Angel, Shelly, and Cesar point to concerns they had depending on writing to communicate their messages.

Communicative Writing with Miss Johnson. In the past Miss Johnson incorporated dialogue journals where students could maintain written correspondence directly with her. When asked to compare the use of dialogue journals Miss Johnson made this comparison.

> I think the dialogue journals that I've done with my students often talk about things and issues that have happened in the classroom. Where this was somebody from the outside who's also bringing up whole new ideas or is this whole new person. The students are responding to them and I'm able to learn about my students in ways I don't think I could if they were just talking back and forth to me.

Even though students had the same freedom to write about any topic they wanted to in the dialogue journals to Miss Johnson, they still didn't serve to motivate the students to write in the same way. Communicative writing to Miss Johnson did not provide the same motivation as with the mentors.

Motivation From Student Topic Choice

Miss Johnson allowed her students freedom in the content of the messages. During student interviews and reflections, a consistent theme repeated was the students' excitement to write about topics that interested them. During their final reflections, students were asked to compare writing to their mentors to writing to Miss Johnson. Laura wrote, "Me and my mentor told jokes. My teacher did not. Most of the time I wrote my teacher about work." During his interview, Brian said, "When I write to Miss Johnson, it feels like it's just normal, but writing to [my mentor] felt different cause we talked about more fun things."

During their interviews, all nine mentors mentioned that they let the students determine the topics they discussed during their correspondence. Carrie said in her interview, "We talked about everything they liked, like their favorite food and sports and stuff." Regina talked about

discussing the students' interests. She said, "I became a Roblox fan because that's what my fifth-grader liked to talk about." Connie said, "Mine were really into sports like football, basketball, and shoes. We had a lot of things in common." Ashley said, "We just talked about everything. I'd ask them random questions and they just answered, favorite food, favorite holiday, and like about their pets and school." When asked about what considerations they made when writing their messages, Amy said, "Always end with a question so we can keep the conversation going." Both Connie and Regina agreed with this statement by Amy.

Analysis found that students initiated 65% of the topics found in the interactions. Table 4.3 shows the percentage of topics initiated by each group of participants.

Table 4.3

Breakdown of Topic Initiation

Participants	Number of Topics Initiated	Percentage Overall
Student	184	65%
Mentor	99	35%

Examination of the frequency of the topic codes revealed that the top three topics that were discussed by the participants were their favorite things, hobbies, and fun facts about them. Table 4.4 shows the frequency of each topic discussed in all the partnerships.

Table 4.4

Frequency of Topics Discussed

Topic	Occurrences	Percentage of Topics
Favorites	71	22%
Hobbies	45	14%
Fun Facts	42	13%
Life Updates	36	11%
Women's Basketball	34	10%
School/College	33	10%
Family/Pets	32	10%
Holidays	23	7%
Goals	9	3%

Favorites, hobbies, and fun facts made up nearly 50% of all topics discussed. The topics discussed were influenced by the situation the participants were in with Covid-19. As previously discussed, Covid-19 influenced the topic selection as the mentors wanted to keep the correspondence positive during tough times.

Confidence Discussing Known Topics. When Miss Johnson was asked about the differences she noticed when students wrote for communicative purposes compared to other forms of academic writing in the classroom she replied.

> They had the confidence in being able to do this. When their mentor wrote them a letter asking questions, they were able to write back off the top of their head. Where if I am saying write an informational essay, they think there's a right or wrong answer to it or something.

While students were allowed to pick their own topics while genre writing, it did not motivate students as much as it did during the mentorship. During her interview Miss Johnson discussed how she allowed students to pick their own topics for their genre writing. She said, "I like to let them choose what they want to write about as much as possible." She mentioned Brian's persuasive essay about why dogs are better than cats and Isaiah's essay persuading his audience that he saw a unicorn. Miss Johnson's struggles to get students to engage with classroom writing shows they were more excited to write about their choice of topics in a communicative context.

Miss Johnson discussed how the students' success with the writing for the mentorship was able to increase their confidence when completing classroom writing assignments. Miss Johnson said she used the students' success communicating with their mentors to "fall back on" when students were struggling with classroom writing and "to remind them that they are writers that can write." She mentioned saying to her students, "if you were writing to your mentor right now, you'd be typing up a storm."

Summary of Finding 1

Writing to an authentic audience from outside of the classroom motivated the students to write for several reasons. They were motivated to get to know someone new both while quarantining at home and when they returned to school. They were also motivated to write for a communicative purpose so their mentors could understand them. Finally, the students were motivated to write for the mentorship because it was a type of writing they could confidently complete while discussing topics that were interesting to them. These same motivations did not exist during classroom writing assignments and led to Miss Johnson's students having a higher level of participation when writing to their mentors.

Finding 2: Miss Johnson's Conversational
Supports Helped Students Develop
Reactive Correspondence

Miss Johnson focused her instruction on communicative expectations and used her

feedback to provide conversational support by suggesting topics and highlighting questions the

students did not respond to. Analysis of the correspondence found that Miss Johnson's feedback

helped the participants develop reactive correspondence according to Rafaeli's Levels of

Interactivity (1988).

Tracking the topics revealed that students often failed to answer their mentors' questions

from the previous message, and they rarely asked follow-up questions to continue the discussion

of a topic. The following section will explore the students' use of questions during the

correspondence and the impact that Miss Johnson's conversational support provided.

Students' Use of Questions During the Correspondence

Questions were used during the correspondence to initiate or continue discussion of

topics. The students asked more questions to initiate topics than their mentors. In total, the

students asked 129 questions to initiate topics, while the mentors asked 66. Students frequently

answered their own questions that they asked. Table 4.5 shows the frequency of how each topic

was initiated.

Table 4.5

How the Participants Initiated Topics

	Student Offered Information	Student Question to Mentor	Student Offered and Question	Mentor Offered Information	Mentor Question To Student	Mentor Offered and Question
Frequency	55	58	71	33	39	27
Percentage	19.4%	20.5%	25.1%	11.7%	13.7%	9.5%

As Table 4.5 shows, 45.6% of all topics were initiated by a student question. Over half of the times the students asked questions to initiate a topic, they answered them as well. These numbers are significantly higher than the mentors who initiated 23.2% of topics through questions. Topic tracking revealed that while the students frequently asked questions to initiate topics, they often failed to ask questions to continue the discussion of a topic.

Students' Lack of Follow-up Questions. Besides using questions to initiate topics, follow-up questions were essential for continual correspondence about a topic. Zero topics became interactive without questions being asked. Two questioning patterns led to interactive correspondence.

Offered Information → Response with Follow-up Question → Response to Follow-Up Question

Initial Question → Response with Follow-up Question → Response to Follow-up Question

Tracking the topics through the messages found students asked significantly fewer follow-up questions about information offered by their mentors and asked fewer follow-up questions when the mentors initiated a topic by asking a question. Each of those instances will be examined next.

Follow-up Questions to Offered Information. When the mentors initiated a topic by offering information, the students only asked four follow-up questions in response. In contrast, the mentors asked 22 follow-up questions to information offered by the students. Table 4.6 shows these frequencies.

Table 4.6

Frequency of Participants Asking Follow-up Questions About Offered Information

Participant	Follow-up Questions
Students	4
Mentors	22

All four of the students' questions to information offered by their mentors occurred in their first message in response to their mentor's introduction videos. Megan asked her mentor Michelle, "what activities do you do in Sweden?" Terrance asked Amy, "what kind of dogs to you have?" and Jared and Maddux asked their mentor questions about basketball. Maddux asked, "who is your favorite player," while Jared asked, "how long have you played basketball." None of the fifth-grade students asked a question about information offered by their mentors during the written exchanges.

Follow-up Questions to Initial Questions. The fifth-grade students also asked fewer follow-up questions after an initial question was asked by their mentors to initiate a topic. Overall, the mentors asked 51 follow-up questions to an initial question while the students only asked thirteen.

The types of follow-up questions were broken down into two types: mirror or extending questions. Mirror questions asked the same question back to the original person who asked the question and extending questions probed for more information regarding the topic. Of the follow-up questions, students asked eight mirror questions and five extending questions. Mentors asked 17 mirror and 38 extending questions. Table 4.7 shows the number of occurrences of the participants follow-up questions when a question was asked to initiate a topic.

Table 4.7

Occurrences of the Types of Follow-up Questions Asked Following an Initial Question

Type of Follow-up Questions	Students	Mentors
Mirror	8	17
Extend	5	38
Total	13	51

The fifth-grade students were more likely to mirror their mentor's questions back to them than their mentors were. The mentors were more likely to continue the correspondence by asking an extending question. Topics discussed where the participants asked extending questions averaged a length of 4.3 exchanges. When the participants asked mirror follow-up questions the topics averaged 3.1 exchanges.

Because questions were so integral for interacting with the mentors, Miss Johnson used her feedback to support her students in asking and answering questions. The next section will examine how Miss Johnson's feedback influenced her students' interactions with their mentors.

Impact of Miss Johnson's Feedback

Miss Johnson gave feedback through both the comment feature on Google Slides and orally in class. Analysis of her written feedback found that Miss Johnson focused her comments on helping her students interact with their mentors. Table 4.1 shows the breakdown in the types of feedback left by Miss Johnson. To see how her suggestions affected the correspondence, I used the history feature on Google Slides. This feature allowed me to go to previous versions of the message to see what the students had written prior to Miss Johnson's feedback. This, in combination with the topic tracking codes, allowed me to understand the impact of her written feedback to her students.

Miss Johnson Suggesting Topics. The most common type of feedback given by Miss Johnson was suggesting topics for her students to discuss. She provided specific topic suggestions such as "Talk about sharing a room with your sister," and general suggestions like, "Talk about what you are doing for the holidays." To show how Miss Johnson's topic suggestions influenced her students' correspondence, I will use an example from Megan and her mentor Michelle. Megan's use of Miss Johnson's feedback provides a representative example of what students did in response to Miss Johnson's topic suggestions. Figure 4.4 shows Megan's first draft of her message to her mentor, Michelle, along with the feedback from Miss Johnson. The full correspondence between Megan and Michelle can be found in Appendix J.

Figure 4.4

Megan's First Draft of her Third Message Along with Miss Johnson's Feedback
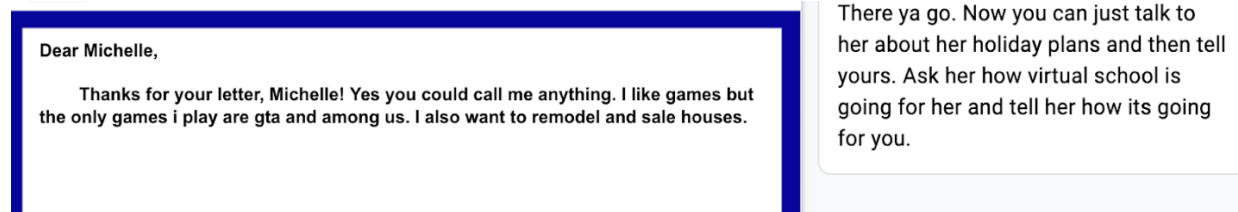

Figure 4.4 shows that after thanking Michelle for her letter, the remainder of Megan's first draft answered the three questions from Michelle's previous message. These questions were, "do you mind if I call you Shaq from now on?; do you have any games you like?; and is there anything you want to do when you grow up?" Miss Johnson's comment on Figure 4.4 suggested topics for Megan to discuss with her mentor. Miss Johnson suggested Megan talk about holiday plans as well as virtual school. Figure 4.5 shows the second draft of Megan's message after receiving Miss Johnson's feedback.

Figure 4.5

Megan's Second Draft Following Miss Johnson's Feedback

> **Dear Michelle,**
>
> **Thanks for your letter, Michelle! Yes you could call me anything. I like games but the only games i play are gta and among us. I also want to remodel and sale houses. This year me and my brother are only getting gifts but not a tree. Are you getting a tree for christmas? What are you doing for new years? On new years i'll be celebrating my birthday, it's on new years. I get birthday hits every year, last year they jumped me when the countdown hit zero. Whens your birthday?**

After receiving Miss Johnson's feedback, Megan added to her message where she had stopped writing for the first draft. While Megan followed Miss Johnson's suggestion to discuss and ask about holiday plans, she disregarded the suggestion to talk about virtual learning. Megan used Miss Johnson's suggestion to talk about her holiday plans for both Christmas and New Year's. This led Megan to also discuss that her birthday coincides with New Year's. While explaining what she was doing during her holidays, Megan included three questions for her mentor to answer, "Are you getting a tree for Christmas?, What are you doing for New Year's?, and When's your birthday?" All three of these questions were answered by Megan's mentor, Michelle, in her following message. Figure 4.6 shows Michelle's follow up message to Megan.

Figure 4.6

Michelle's Message Back to Megan

Hi Megan!

What's up, Shaq! Hope the break has been good and that you are doing well!

I spent Christmas with one of my teammates and her family since I couldn't go home and we had a huge Christmas tree! I got some nice clothes for Christmas, what about you? Did you get anything fun?

For New Years we celebrated my roommate's birthday (yes, she has her birthday on New Year's Eve, just like you, so happy belated birthday to you!). I made her a cake and we were just enjoying ourselves with games and music! What did you do? Also what kind of music do you listen to(if you listen to music)?

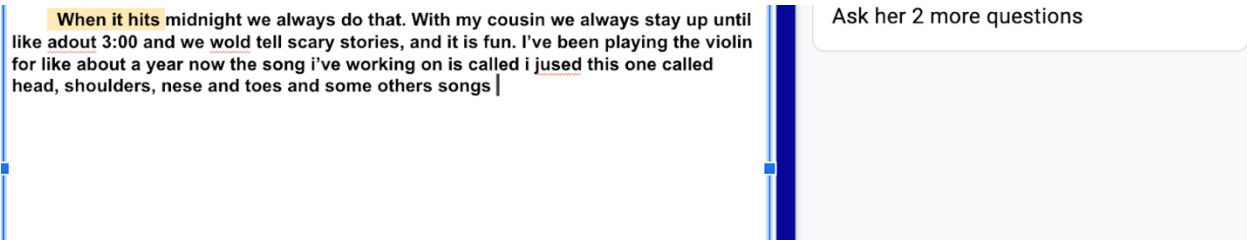Take care and we'll talk soon!

Michelle

Michelle's message to Megan replies to the new information that Megan added after the feedback from Miss Johnson. She responded with her Christmas plans and birthday plans. Michelle also asks Megan questions that continue the correspondence about holidays along with questions to initiate new topics such as the types of music Megan listens to. Miss Johnson's general topic suggestion regarding the holidays helped Megan and Michelle make a connection involving New Year's Eve birthday parties.

Miss Johnson Requiring More Questions. Miss Johnson's second most common type of feedback was requiring students ask more questions to their mentors. In her writing checklist for the students, she instructed the students to ask three questions. When students failed to do so, she used her feedback to remind them of that expectation. To understand how this expectation impacted the correspondence we will look at Julie's message to her mentor Regina. Figure 4.7 Julie's message along with Miss Johnson's feedback. Julie and Regina's full correspondence can be found in Appendix K.

Figure 4.7

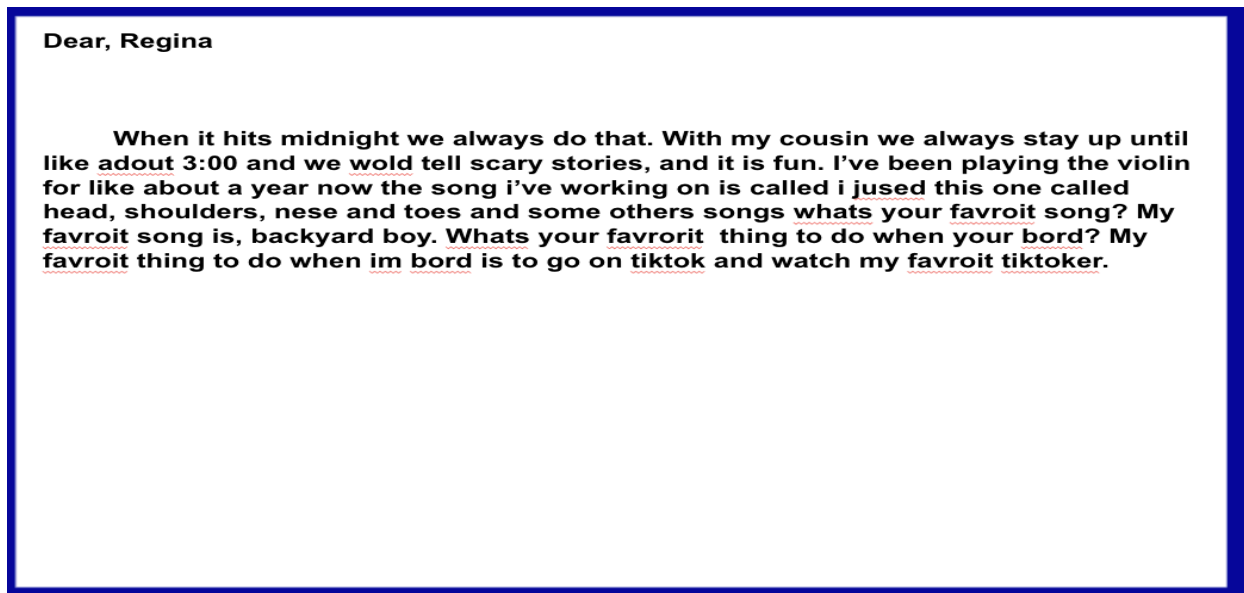*Julie's First Draft Along with Miss Johnson's Feedback*

Like Megan's previous example, Julie's first draft of her message focused on answering

Regina's questions from the previous message. While Julie answered the questions, she did not

ask Regina any questions involving the topics. Miss Johnson simply commented that she should

ask her two questions. Figure 4.8 shows Julie's second draft following Miss Johnson's feedback.

Figure 4.8

Julie's Second Draft Following Miss Johnson's Feedback

Figure 4.8 shows Julie met Miss Johnson's writing expectation by adding two questions

at the end of their message. Julie answered both questions she asked Regina. She wrote, "What's

your favorite song? My favorite song is Backyard Boy" and "What's your favorite thing to do

when you are bored? My favorite thing to do when I'm bored is to go on Tiktok and watch my

favorite Tiktoker." Like Megan's previous example, Julie added her questions to the end of her

first message. The questions did not connect to the mentors' previous message and began new

topics to discuss. Figure 4.9 shows Regina's response to Julie's message.

Figure 4.9

Regina's Message Back to Julie

HI JULIE!!!

THAT'S SO COOL THAT YOU HAVE BEEN PLAYING VIOLIN THAT LONG, THAT'S VERY IMPRESSIVE! I HAVE NEVER HEARD BACKYARD BOY BEFORE, BUT I LOOKED IT UP AND IT WAS A GOOD SONG! I DON'T REALLY HAVE A FAVORITE SONG I LIKE ALL COUNTRY MUSIC! I LIKE TO WATCH TV WHEN IM BORED AND I ALSO WATCH TIK TOK! DO YOU KNOW ANY DANCES? WHO'S YOUR FAVORITE TIK TOKER? DID YOU GUYS GET TO HAVE A SPRING BREAK? ME AND MY TEAMMATE CLAIRE WENT TO FLORIDA FOR 5 DAYS. IT WAS REALLY FUN AND RELAXING! WHAT DID YOU DO FOR EASTER? DO YOU AND YOUR FAMILY DO AN EASTER EGG HUNT? IT WAS FUN GETTING TO TALK TO YOU AGAIN, HOPE TO TALK TO YOU AGAIN SOON!!

REGINA

Figure 4.9 shows the first half of Regina's letter replied to the new questions asked by

Julie following Miss Johnson's suggestion. Regina continued the correspondence regarding

TikTok by asking two follow-up questions. She asks, "Do you know any dances?" and "Who's

your favorite TikToker?" The new topics introduced by Julie because of Miss Johnson requiring

two more questions led to further correspondence regarding TikTok.

Miss Johnson Highlighting Missed Questions. Miss Johnson also provided

communicative support by highlighting questions that students did not respond to from their

mentor's previous message. To show the typical impact of this type of feedback we will look at an example from Brian and his mentor, Carrie. Figure 4.10 shows Brian's first draft to Carrie along with Miss Johnson's feedback to Brian. Brian and Carrie's full correspondence can be found in Appendix L.

Figure 4.10

Brian's First Draft Along with Miss Johnson's Feedback

In addition to the comment, Miss Johnson also went back to the mentor's message and highlighted the questions that were missed. Figure 4.11 shows Carrie's previous message with Miss Johnson's highlighted questions that Brian did not answer.

Figure 4.11

Carrie's Message to Brian with Highlighted Missed Questions

In Brian's response to Carrie, he failed to respond to seven of the eleven questions asked to him. Brian selected what questions he responded to. For example, he answered the question "what are their names," but not the second half of the question "what kind of dogs do you have?' He also didn't respond to most of the final string of questions but choose to answer the final two questions about video games and Christmas. Figure 4.12 shows Brian's message after Miss Johnson highlighted the questions he missed.

Figure 4.12

Brian's Second Draft After Miss Johnson Highlighted Missed Questions

Following Miss Johnson's feedback Brian answered the remaining highlighted questions. Like Julie and Megan's previous examples, Brian added to the bottom of his letter following Miss Johnson's feedback. He did this even though his new responses are connected to the content of his first draft. For example, he added the part about his dog's breed to the bottom of the message even though it connected to the discussion about his dog's names. Figure 4.13 shows Carrie's response to Brian's message.

Figure 4.13

Carrie's Message Back to Brian

Hey Brian!

It was so wonderful to see you in your video and I hope you had a wonderful Christmas and got everything you wanted! What did you end up getting for Christmas? You should send me some pictures of your dogs if you have any, I would love to see them! You asked if I play Xbox. I actually used to play call of duty of my brothers Xbox when I was younger and I loved it. I have played fortnite a few times but not much, I don't understand it. Speaking of six flags, we are on our way to our first road trip and we drove past six flags! I hope to go there someday! I went home to Minnesota for Christmas and was with my parents and brother most of the time and he brought over his dogs too so it was awesome seeing them. Did you spend time with any family over break? Being a chef would be awesome, I wish I could cook. Do you do any cooking at home? When you become a chef you will have to come cook for me lol. How's school going? Do you enjoy playing in the snow? It's was so nice talking again.

Talk to you soon pal!

Carrie

Carrie responded to Brian's questions and asked follow-up questions to the answers Brian provided at the bottom of his message. Carrie's follow-up questions eventually led to an interactive correspondence about Brian's response about wanting to be a chef. These interactive topics will be further explored in the section on Research Question 2.

Summary of Finding 2

Miss Johnson's feedback helped students be more aware of their mentors by setting expectations for interacting, pointing out questions the students failed to address, and suggesting topics. Similar impacts on students' messages were found following Miss Johnsons' feedback. Students typically incorporated Miss Johnson's feedback by continuing their message from where they had stopped. If they were asked to add questions, the questions were added to the end

of the message and did not follow-up with topics from the previous message but rather introduced new topics to discuss.

Miss Johnson's support helped largely to promote reactive messages that required her students to respond to the previous message and provide questions that could be responded to in the following message. In doing so, she helped to facilitate reactive communication according to Rafaeli's Model of Interactive Communication (1988). While some of the topics that were introduced because of Miss Johnson's feedback did become fully interactive, analysis found the level of interactivity of a topic was influenced by the participants and not Miss Johnson. The following section on Research Question 2 will explore how topics became fully interactive.

Research Question 2

In the following section I will present the findings from my analysis of data regarding my second research question.

Q2   What contributed to high levels of interactive communication during written correspondence between the fifth-grade students and their college mentors?

As discussed in the previous section, Miss Johnson's feedback supported students with writing reactive messages to their mentors according to Rafaeli's Model of Interactive Communication (1988). Her instructions and feedback mainly resulted in her students responding to the last message and asking questions to bring up new topics. Rafaeli's model differentiates reactive communication from interactive communication by the connectedness of the message to the previous messages in the communication. "Interactivity is the extent to which messages in a sequence relate to each other, and especially the extent to which later messages recount the relatedness of earlier messages" (Rafaeli, 1988). Interactive communication has been shown to lead to positive outcomes for the participants such as higher motivation, feelings of acceptance, and satisfaction (Rafaeli, 1988).

To analyze the interactivity of the correspondence, I applied Rafaeli's Model of Interactive Communication (1988) to the messages between the students and their mentors using descriptive codes to track the topics. This allowed me to isolate and analyze the topics the participants discussed for the greatest number of messages. Analysis of these topics, according to the methods outlined in Chapter 3, revealed the following findings regarding the influences on the interactivity of the messages.

Finding 1   The participants' affinity for a topic led to higher levels of interactive correspondence.

Finding 2   When a shared affinity was not present, interactive correspondence depended on the mentors' interest in a topic.

The following section will provide the results of the analysis that led to these findings along with examples of the participants' correspondence.

**Each Partnerships' Topic Found in the
Most Exchanges**

Tracking the descriptive codes allowed me to determine the topics that were discussed for the greatest number of exchanges. Each of partnerships' most interactive topic, according to the number of messages it was discussed, can be found in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8

Each Partnerships' Topic Discussed in the Most Messages

Partners (Mentor and Student)	Topic Discussed	Number of Messages the Topic was Discussed
Connie and Maddux	Basketball	10
Connie and Jared	Basketball	9
Carrie and Brian	Pets	8
Amy and Terrance	Drawing	8
Ally and Charlie	Drawing	8
Regina and Addison	Roblox	6
Ashley and Shelly	School	6
Ashley and Rachel	School	6
Claire and Cesar	Holidays	6
Trinity and Angel	Pets	5
Michelle and Megan	Things for Fun	5
Carrie and Laura	Moving	5
Regina and Julie	Holidays	5
Michelle and Stephanie	Favorite Food	4
Claire and Isaiah	Holidays	4
Amy and Becky	Favorite Animal	4

The topics discussed for the greatest number of messages for each partnership varied from the three partnerships with four exchanges to Maddux and Jared's correspondence where they discussed basketball in all their exchanges with Connie. It was clear after reviewing the transcripts and considering what led certain partnerships to discuss their topics longer than others, that the participants' interest in the topic influenced the extent to which the topic was

discussed. Using the term *affinity,* I coded the transcripts and interviews to determine the participants' relationship to the topic.

Participants' Relationship to the Topics

Coding by the participants' affinity for the topic, revealed three relationships the participants had to a topic; both participants had a shared affinity for the topic, only one participant had an affinity for the topic, or neither participant had an affinity for the topic. The frequency of the participants' relationship to the topic discussed for the greatest number of messages is shown in Figure 4.14.

Figure 4.14

Participants' Relationship to the Topic Discussed for the Greatest Length
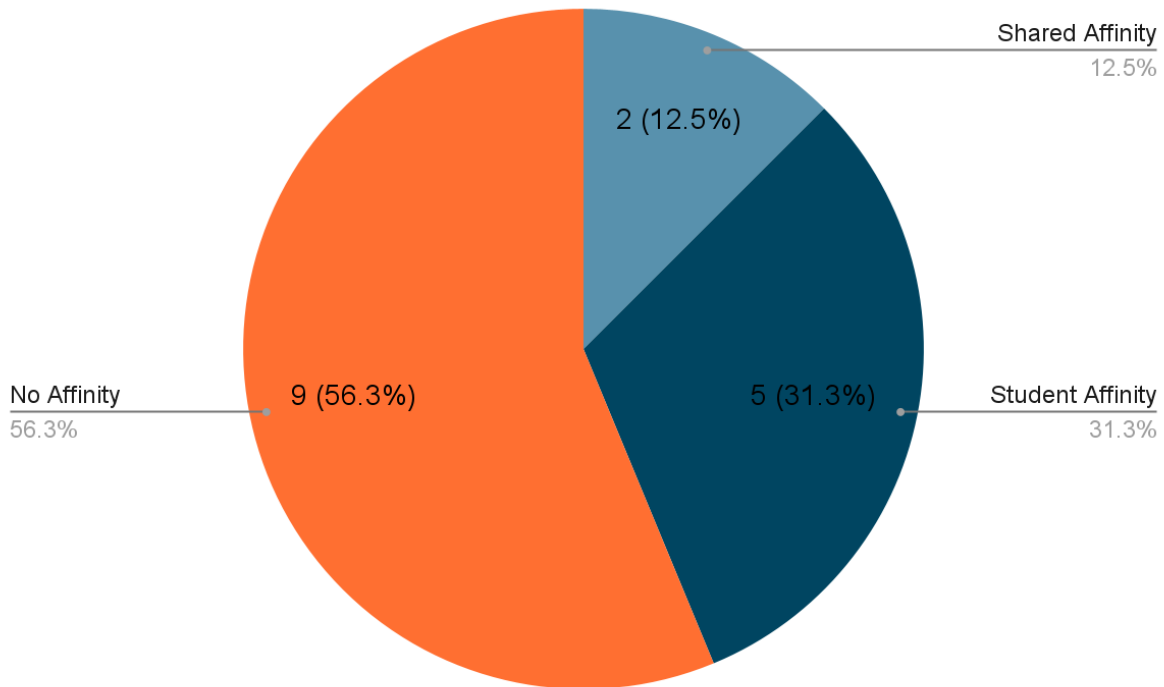
Figure 4.14 shows only two of the partnerships discussed a topic for which they had a shared affinity. Five of the partnerships' most interactive topics involved an affinity by the student, and nine involved a topic for which neither participant had an affinity. These

correspondences involved a shared general experience such as schooling or holidays. On average the correspondence over topics with a shared affinity were discussed over a longer period than the partnerships where one participant had an affinity to the topic or there was no affinity by either participant. Figure 4.15 shows the average number of messages for each type of participant relationship to the topic.

Figure 4.15

Average Messages the Most Interactive Topic was Discussed Based on the Affinity for the Topic
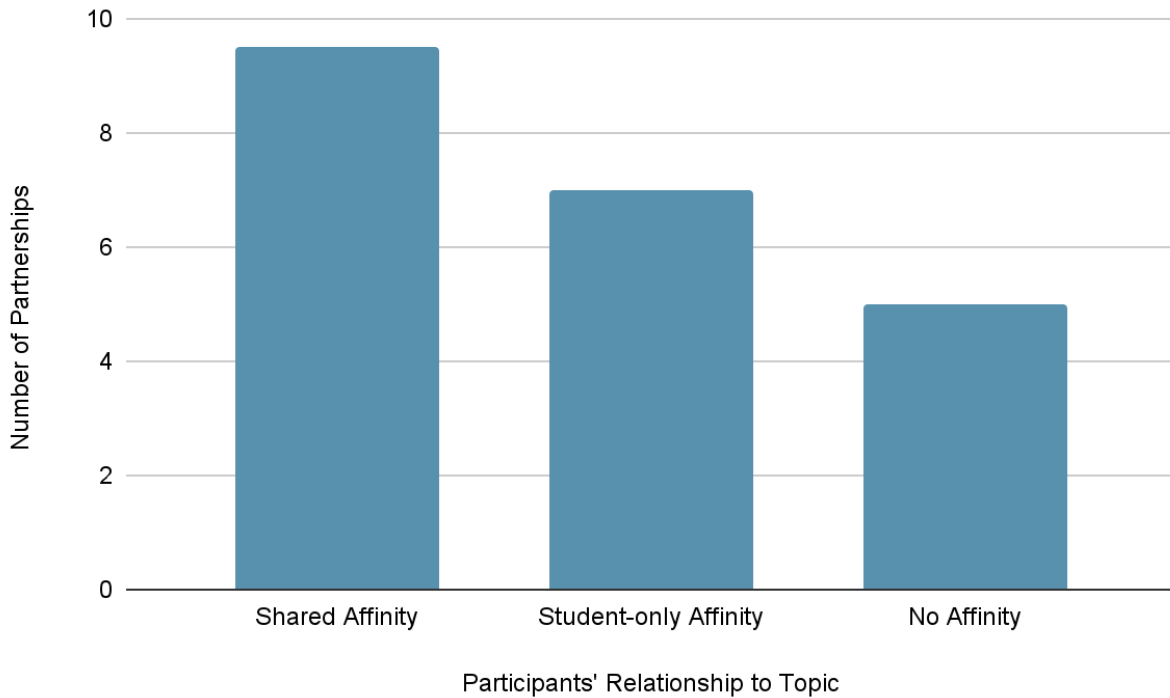
Figure 4.15 shows the two partnerships with a shared affinity discussed their most interactive topic an average of 9.5 messages. Topics with a student-only affinity were discussed an average of seven messages and topics without an affinity were discussed five messages. Analysis of the messages in each category found the participants' affinity towards the topic affected the interactivity of the correspondence. The following section will examine this finding

by providing Maddux and Jared's exchanges about basketball with their mentor Connie to show how their affinity influenced their correspondence.

**Finding 1: The Participants' Affinity for a Topic
Led to Higher Levels of Interactive
Correspondence**

Analysis of the two correspondences with a shared affinity found that, in addition to discussing the topic for a greater number of messages, there were other characteristics of the correspondence that led to interactivity. The following section will examine the two correspondences with a shared affinity to the topic to understand how that affinity led to interactive correspondence. First, I will show each correspondence and then will discuss patterns found in both.

Correspondence Over a Shared Affinity

Two of the partnerships corresponded about a topic for which they had a shared affinity. Connie and her two mentees, Maddux and Jared shared a love for basketball. Connie was in her first year with the basketball program and was a criminal justice major. Miss Johnson specifically commented on her pairing of Connie with Jared and Maddux for the partnership. In her interview she said,

> Both Jared and Maddux struggled with consistency with remote learning. Their environments often kept them from fully engaging online. I knew they would connect over basketball with Connie and hoped it would help motivate them. While it didn't help improve their attendance, [mentor mail] was clearly the assignment they cared about the most. Sometimes Jared would login just to ask if they had heard from their mentors and then log off.

Both Maddux and Jared's correspondence with Connie about basketball are discussed next.

Maddux and Connie's Correspondence About Basketball. Maddux remained virtual for the entire year and Miss Johnson said his assignment completion and attendance fluctuated. Miss Johnson described him as an independent and confident technology user, but also a struggling writer who was reluctant to revisit assignments after completing a first draft.

Maddux's affinity for basketball was determined through his correspondence and his reflections. In his eighth message Maddux wrote, "if I went to the NBA i would join the Lakers or the blazers." Also, in his reflection, when asked what he was excited to share with his mentor Maddux replied, "my dream." Table 4.9 shows the full transcript of the correspondence Maddux and Connie had regarding basketball. Their full correspondence can be found in Appendix M.

Table 4.9

Full Transcript of Maddux and Connie's Correspondence About Basketball

Message - Participant	Text Involving Basketball
Message 1 - Connie	I'm originally from California. Go Lakers, Dodgers - champions this year. The position that I play is like a 1 2. Like a point guard/shooting guard.
Message 2 - Maddux	my hobbies are playing basketball and football i'm a fan of the lakers to lebron james is my favorite player who is yours? Also me and you play the same position in basketball im a point guard too. one more thing when your on the court do you feel like u have a lot of pressure on u i do sometime.
Message 3 - Connie	I'm happy that your favorite team is the Lakers because they are best! My favorite basketball player is Kobe Bryant! My favorite sports when I was a kid is actually still the same basketball and football. That is so cool that you're a point guard and Who is your favorite point guard in the NBA? Getting into college is not hard if you get study and get good grades! If you want to play sports in college you need to work hard and dedicate your time to whatever sport you play! Hard work pays off!! Sports isn't just physical it's mental! You have to stay strong whenever things to do not go your way! Don't give up you got it! I sometimes feel like there is pressure on me if people expect a lot for me sometimes but I take that as a compliment!
Message 4 - Maddux	And my favorite point guard is curry. and do u like curry.
Message 5 - Connie	Also, Curry is good. I do like Curry he is good but I really like Damian Lillard and Kyrie! Do you like them?

Table 4.9, Continued

Message - Participant	Text Involving Basketball
Message 6 - Maddux	Yes i do like Damian Lillard and Kyrie. And i like kyrie because he is fast and i like lillard because he can dunk and he can make three and do u like jordan and do u like lebron james son and how many points have u made this season if u went to the nba what team would u want to join when i go to the nba i am going to join the golden state warrior or the lakers.
Message 7 - Connie	Yes I love Jordan do you think he is the greatest player of all time? I think Kobe Bryant is the greatest of all time. Lebrons son Bronny is ok I don't think he is bad he is just young. How do you feel about Bronny? This season I averaged 9.7 points a game will do better next year! If i went to the NBA I would be on the Lakers because I love the Lakers and I love California. How you heard about the WNBA?
Message 8 - Maddux	hey i don't reality know who i think is the best player and i think bronny is good do u like the blazers and if i went to the nba i would join the lakers or the blazers and when i was in fourth grade somebody it was a coach and he liked how i played so i played for that team i think kobe is the best three point shooter who do u think is the best three pointer i do like this dunk thought ok bye did u like this dunk. And one more thing how to make more of my threes.
Message 9 - Connie	I am a Lakers fan but I like Damian Lillard on the Blazers. If you went to the NBA I think the Lakers would be a great team for you that is my favorite team. I love Kobe Bryant he is my favorite player of all time! Kobe is a good shooter and Lebron's dunk is cool not a big fan of him. I made 25 3s this season.
Message 10 - Maddux	O yes and have u played 2k i have and i made him play shooting garod and he is sooooo good at threes and he can dunk and yes kobe is super good but who do u think would win jordan or kobe. And thanks for talking with me. And i liked what we talked about and thanks for helping me with my jump shot.

Maddux and Connie discussed basketball related topics in all of their exchanges. Using the word count of each message, I calculated the percentage of the overall message that involved basketball. These results can be found in Figure 4.16.

Figure 4.16

Maddux and Connie's Percentage of Overall Correspondence Involving Basketball
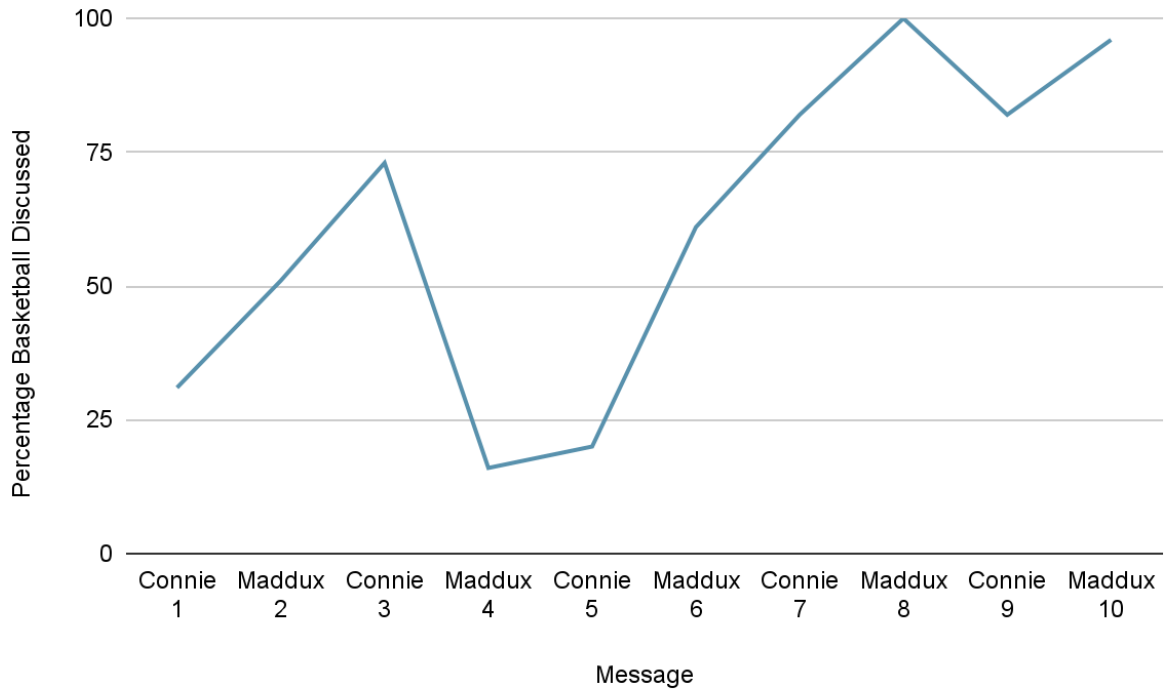
Figure 4.16 shows there was an overall rise in the amount of discussion about basketball throughout the exchanges. In the final four exchanges, basketball related topics were discussed over 80% of the time, with Maddux's eighth and tenth message being almost completely about basketball.

Throughout their correspondence about basketball, Maddux and Connie discussed several topics regarding basketball simultaneously. The different topic strands of the correspondence discussing basketball can be found in Figure 4.17.

Figure 4.17

Maddux and Connie's Topic Strands Involving Basketball with Conversation Codes
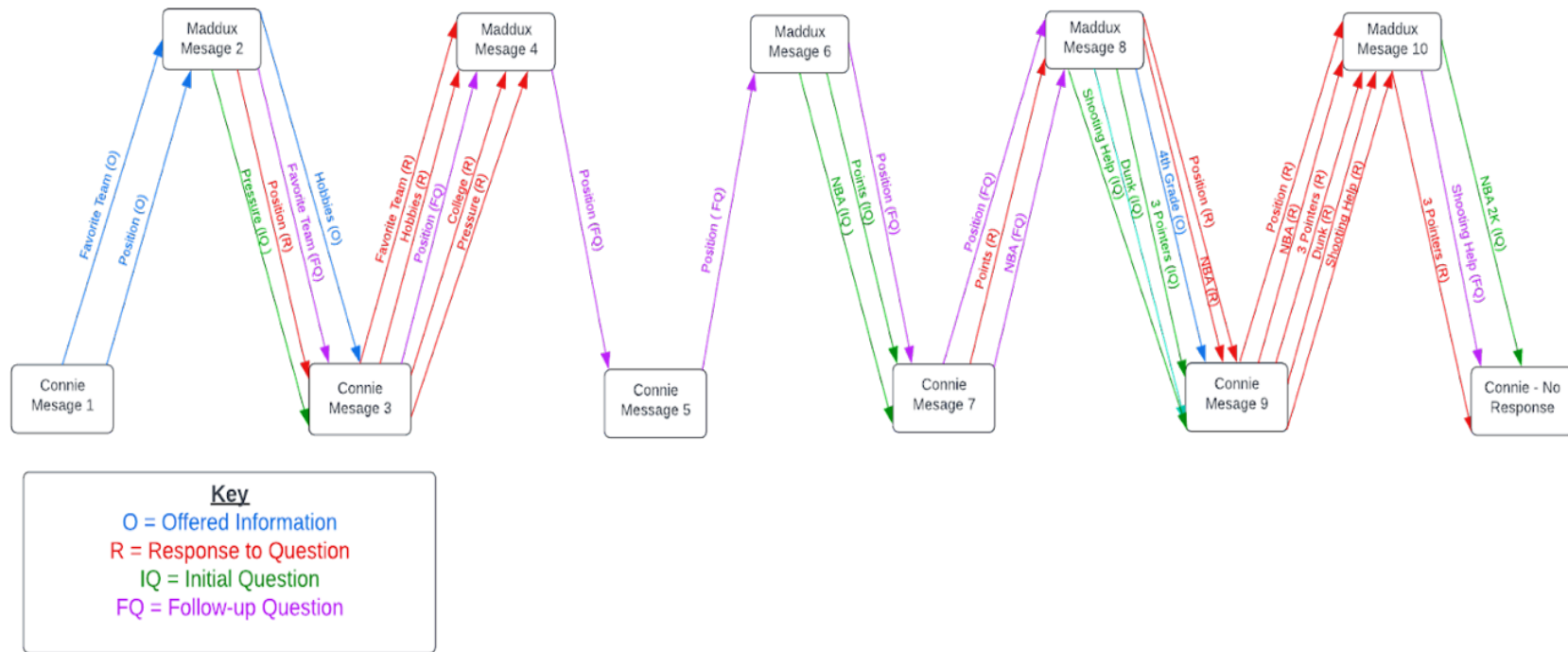
Overall, Maddux and Connie discussed eight topics regarding basketball. Connie initiated two of the topics in her introduction video and the rest were initiated by Maddux. The correspondence regarding what position the participants played and their favorite NBA players to play that position was discussed for the greatest number of slides. Throughout the correspondence Connie asked four questions with three mirroring questions back that Maddux asked to her and one question extending the discussion. Maddux asked a total of nine questions throughout the correspondence. He asked two mirror questions and seven extending questions.

The topic strands show that Maddux initiates the topics responded to by Connie. In Maddux's second message he discusses four basketball related topics and Connie replies with five topics in her third message. In the following message, when Maddux only discussed a single basketball topic in his fourth message, Connie only responds to one topic in her fifth message. When Maddux increases the basketball related topics in his sixth and eighth messages, Connie also increases her discussion. Maddux appears to control the discussion of basketball related topics.

Overall, Maddux and Connie had a highly interactive correspondence about basketball. The topic diagram of Maddux and Connie's serves as a visual representation of the connections formed while discussing basketball. As discussed, Rafaeli argues that the more messages connect to each other and build the more positive outcomes are experienced by the participants such as motivation, acceptance, and satisfaction. Connie also connected with her other mentee, Jared, about basketball. Their exchange will be examined in the next section.

Jared and Connie's Correspondence About Basketball. Like Maddux, Jared also remained home attending school virtually for the entire school year. Miss Johnson said he had many technological and environmental factors that limited his class participation causing him to

be absent for much of the school year. Miss Johnson described him as a struggling reader and writer but also as having a strong desire to engage and complete assignments correctly.

Jared's affinity for basketball was determined by his comment in is fourth message. Jared wrote that it was "[his] dream to be a NBA player i want to play for goldan state." Table 4.10 shows the full transcript of the correspondence Jared and Connie had regarding basketball. Their full correspondence can be found in Appendix N.

Table 4.10

Full Transcript of Jared and Connie's Correspondence About Basketball

Message - Participant	Text Involving Basketball
Message 1 - Connie	I'm originally from California. Go Lakers, Dodgers - champions this year. The position that I play is like a 1 2. Like a point guard/shooting guard
Message 2 - Jared	i play basketball to just like you. how long have you played basketball i played since i was like 5 now im 10
Message 3 - Connie	that is so cool that you play basketball! I have been playing basketball since I was 5 too! Who is your favorite basketball player?
Message 4 - Jared	my dream is to be a nba player i want to play for goldan states. my favorite basketball player is curry liceskin land im liceskin. I know you new to the team how is it going?
Message 5 - Connie	I see you're dream is to be in the NBA that is amazing I hope you work hard and push yourself! You will go through ups and downs but the game is mental and you can do it! I believe in you! Don't let anything get in your way!! I see you want to play for Golden State what number do you want? I am a big Lakers fan but Curry is good too. Curry is light skin like you make me laugh lol. I am new to the team and it's cool we are 0-2 but we will get better!! It's only the beginning!
Message 6 - Jared	how is basketball going. how are you doing im just in school trying to get in the nba working as hard as i can
Message 7 - Connie	Right now our team is doing post season workouts and it is pretty fun I am learning a lot! How do you think the Warriors are doing this NBA season? How do you think Curry is doing? I hope everything is going good for you keep working hard in school and basketball so can make your dreams come true!
Message 8 - Jared	im doing fine i think i got better at basketball have you? curry sill in the league lebron is mad lebron is going to be on space jam you should watch it can you give me some advice from you team and you and i think curry is doing good living the the rich life
Message 9 - Connie	Thats awesome that you got better at basketball I have too! This postseason I have working a lot of my game. Keep grinding and putting in the work the results will be great! Oh yes I saw that Lebron was on Space Jam and yes I will be watching.Jesse keep doing good in school and respect your teacher and coaches! If you keep working hard you can be rich like Curry!

Like Maddux and Connie, Jared and Connie discussed basketball in all of their exchanges. Examination of the word count found that the amount of their correspondence that involved basketball increased as the exchanges went on. The percentage of each message that discussed basketball can be found in Figure 4.18.

Figure 4.18

Jared and Connie's Percentage of Correspondence Regarding Basketball
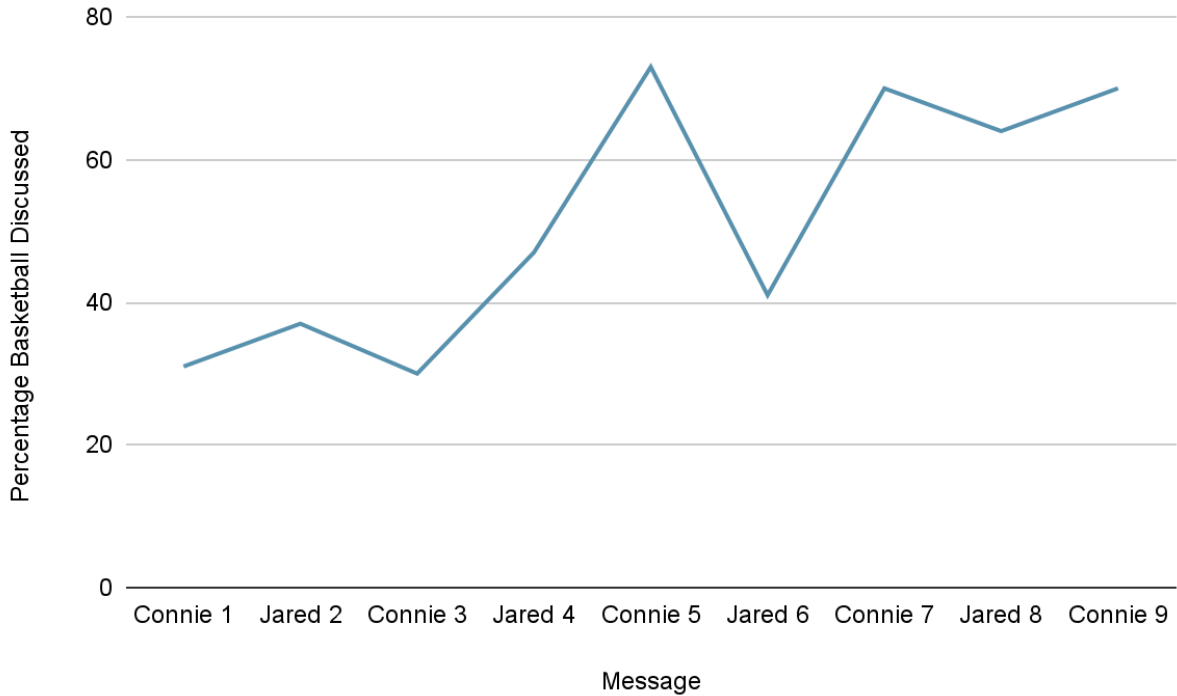
In their first three exchanges Jared and Connie discuss basketball for less than forty percent of their overall messages. This increases to over sixty-five percent in their final three exchanges. Jared and Connie discussed several basketball topics simultaneously. Figure 4.19 shows their topic strands regarding basketball.

Figure 4.19

Jared and Connie's Topic Strands Involving Basketball with Conversation Codes
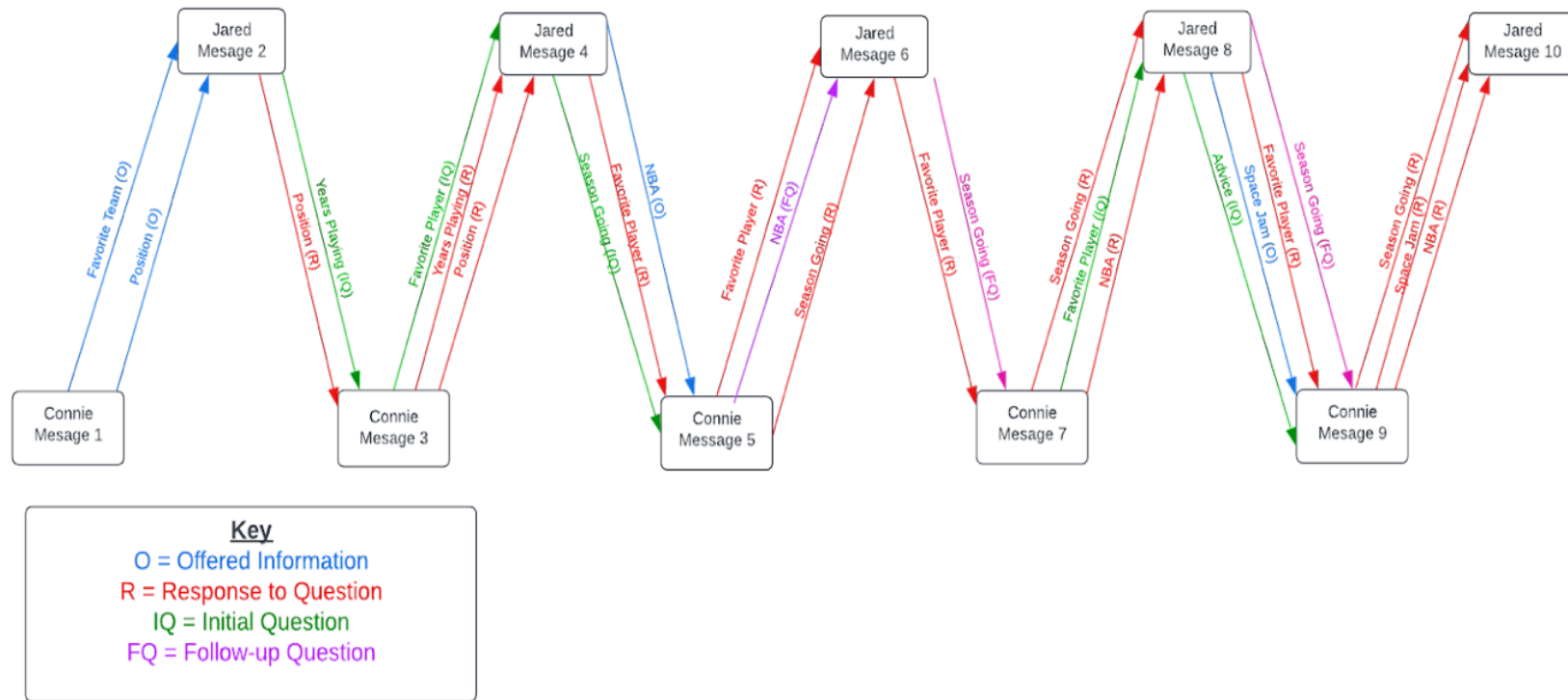
Overall, Jared and Connie discussed seven topics regarding basketball. Connie initiated three of the topics and Jared four. The topic they discussed the most was about their favorite players and was found in four of their messages. Jared and Connie discussed three or more topics involving basketball in six of the nine exchanges. All four of Connie's questions extended the discussion. She didn't ask any mirror questions. Jared asked a total of six extending questions throughout the correspondence and no mirror questions.

Again, the topic diagram shows highly interactive correspondence between Jared and Connie. Compared to Maddux and Connie, Jared and Connie's topic strands are much more consistent between two and four topics in each message. The consistent correspondence of the topic represents a consistent connection formed by the participants over their shared affinity for basketball. As discussed, these connections in communication have been shown to lead to the same positive outcomes desired from the mentorship. The next section will discuss the characteristics found in both Maddux and Jared's correspondence with Connie about basketball.

Characteristics of Correspondence Over a
Shared Affinity

Similar characteristics were found in both Maddux and Jared's correspondence with Connie. These characteristics can be attributed to their shared basketball experience. The participants connected over their basketball experience in their first messages to each other. In Connie's introduction video she stated her position on the basketball team. "The position that I play is like a 1 2. Like a point guard/shooting guard." Both Jared and Maddux shared they played as well in their first message back to Connie. Jared started, "I play basketball just like you." Maddux started by writing, "me and you play the same position. In basketball im a point guard too." Maddux also immediately connected his experience playing basketball to that of Connie's. In his first message Maddux asked, "When you are on the court do you feel like u have a lot of

119

pressure on u I do sometime." This connection over a shared experience led to an increased discussion about basketball, and it also led to chances for Connie to mentor her two mentees. Each of those similarities will be discussed next.

Increased Discussion About Basketball

While Jared and Maddux's overall word count of their messages did not increase, the amount of discussion regarding basketball did. In Maddux's first two messages, he talked about basketball-related topics for 52% and 16% of the messages while he talked about basketball 100% of his eighth message and 96% of his tenth message. Similarly, Jared initially talked about basketball for 37% of his first message, and he discussed basketball related topics for 64% of his final message. The increased discussion about basketball can be attributed to the participants asking each other follow-up questions and expanding the discussion to other topics.

Both Participants Asked Follow-up Questions. The shared experience by the students and Connie led to an increase in questions asked by the students. Maddux asked nine questions regarding basketball, and Jared asked six. Analysis of the other fourteen partnerships' most interactive topics found the students only averaged 1.3 follow-up questions throughout the correspondence. The frequency of follow-up questions can be found in Figure 4.20.

Figure 4.20

Maddux, Jared, and Connie's Number of Follow-up Questions Compared to the Average of the Other Partnerships
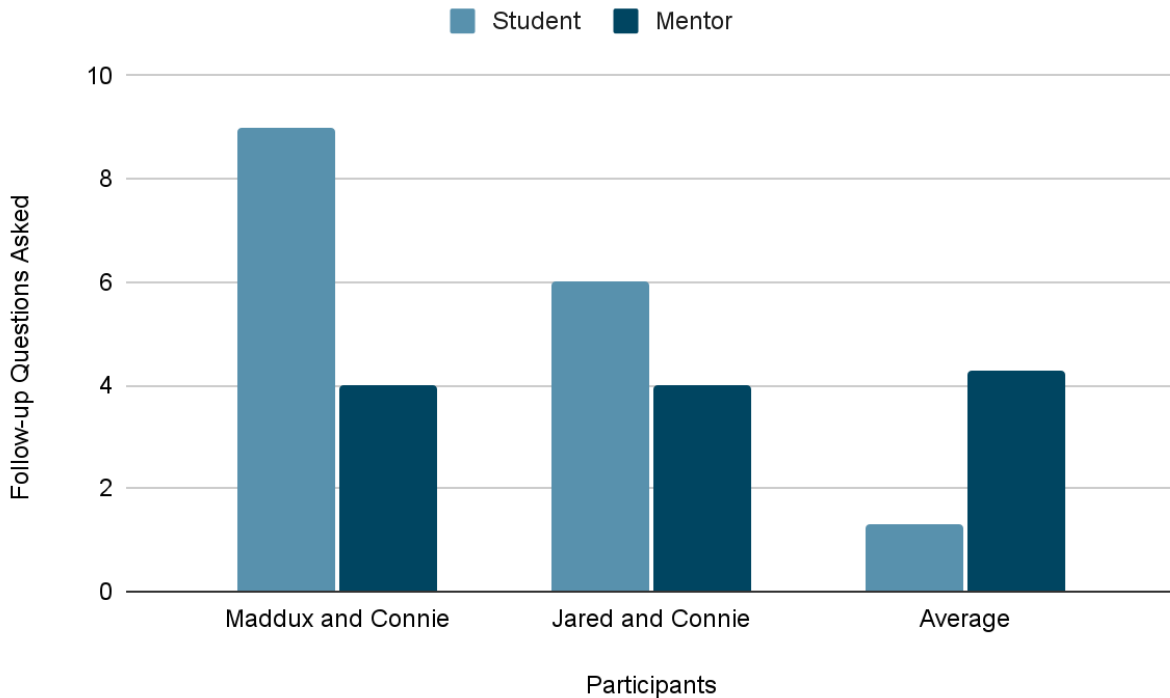
Figure 4.20 shows while Connie asked relatively the same amount of follow-up questions as the mentor average, Maddux and Jared asked significantly more follow-up questions than the student average of 1.3. Maddux and Jared asked questions that expanded the correspondence about basketball to other basketball related topics. Maddux and Connie discussed seven topics involving basketball, and Jared and Connie discussed eight. The fourteen other partnerships' longest topic averaged only 2.3 topic strands.

Basketball Mentoring

Not only did Connie and her mentees have a common experience playing basketball, they shared a dream of playing professional sports. Connie said in her interview, "I know [my mentees] were talking about going pro in something and that's something I would like to do too so I could push them and stuff. I could give them advice and stuff to achieve their goals." Connie

used her position as someone with more experience with basketball to give advice and provide motivation. When Jared wrote, "my dream is to be a nba player." Connie replied,

> I see you're dream is to be in the NBA. That is amazing. I hope you work hard and push yourself! You will go through ups and downs but the game is mental and you can do it! I believe in you! Don't let anything get in your way!!

Connie asserted herself as someone who has gone through the experience of being successful at basketball by writing "you will go through ups and downs." Connie also used her expertise in basketball to provide mentoring for other facets of their life such as schooling. In his second message, Maddux asked if getting into college was hard. In the following message Connie replied,

> Getting into college is not hard if you get study and get good grades! If you want to play sports in college you need to work hard and dedicate your time to whatever sport you play! Hard work pays off!! Sports isn't just physical it's mental! You have to stay strong whenever things do not go your way! Don't give up you got it!

Even though Maddux didn't ask about basketball, Connie connected her response to sports and provided words of encouragement with her advice.

Summary of Finding 1

Topics where the participants had a shared affinity were discussed for greater lengths than correspondence over topics that did not have that affinity. Characteristics of the interactive correspondence where participants had a shared affinity towards the topic included an increased discussion of the topic along with a significant increase in the students' asking of follow-up questions compared to partnerships without a shared affinity. The shared experience provided

opportunities for mentoring of the students both in the area of the shared affinity and other facets of life.

Finding 2: When a Shared Affinity was Not Present,
Interactive Correspondence Depended on the
Mentors' Interest in a Topic

Maddux and Jared's correspondence with Connie about basketball were the only two partnerships to discuss a topic with a shared affinity. The other fourteen partnerships' most interactive topics depended on the mentors' follow-up questions to be interactive. To present this finding, I will provide two examples that show a typical interactive correspondence about a student affinity. The two examples clearly demonstrate the role the mentors' questions had in continuing the correspondence about the topic.

An example of a topic where the participants did not have an affinity will be included in the summary of Research Question 2 at the end of this section. The exchanges without an affinity were like the two examples provided in that the continued correspondence of the topics depended on the mentor's follow-up questions. Like the previous finding, I will first present the examples and then discuss the patterns found.

Correspondence About a Student Affinity

Five of the partnerships' most interactive topics involved a students' affinity. In all five of the partnerships the students expressed excitement for sharing their affinity with their mentor When asked during a reflection, "what are you excited to share with your mentor?" Brian wrote, "I was excited to tell her that I have a leopard gecko and about my dogs." Likewise, Becky wrote, "i was excited to share things i like, like the music i like."

Even though the students were excited to discuss their interests, the interactivity of the topic depended on the mentors' follow-up questions during the correspondence. The following

123

two examples will show how the mentors' follow-up questions helped to develop interactive correspondence about a students' interest.

Addison and Regina's Correspondence About Roblox. Addison attended class virtually for the entire year and had consistent attendance. Miss Johnson described her as a confident technology user, but not for academic purposes. She said Addison struggled to independently navigate the learning platform, complete assignments, and engage synchronously. Addison was paired with Regina. Regina was in her third year with the basketball program and was an elementary education major.

Addison's affinity for Roblox was determined by her correspondence and reflections. In her fourth message Addison shares, "my favorite thing to do is play Roblox." When asked what she was excited to talk about with her mentor she wrote, "roblox." In her third message, Regina shared that she was unfamiliar with the game. She wrote, "I do not have a roblox, what do you do on that game?" Table 4.11 shows the full correspondence between Regina and Addison discussing Roblox. Their full correspondence can be found in Appendix O.

Table 4.11

Full Transcript of Addison and Regina's Correspondence About Roblox

Message - Participant	Text Involving Roblox
Message 2 - Addison	Do you play roblox I play roblox and on adopt me i have a fly rat five bats four snow cats a fennce fox a normal cat a chocolate lab and idk what else i have in that game for pets
Message 3 - Regina	I do not have a roblox, what do you do on that game?
Message 4 - Addison	roblox is not one game but a app were there is a bunch of games like 10000 games my favorite thing to do is play roblox
Message 5 - Regina	roblox sounds very fun and it sounds like there's a lot of things to do on that game! if you could pick one out of the 10,000 which game would be your favorite?
Message 6 - Addison	Well my favorite games on roblox are wings of fire early acsess dragons life and forgotton worlds because i have gamepasses in those games
Message 7 - Regina	Your roblox games all sound super fun to play and entertaining!

The correspondence over Roblox was initiated by Addison in her first letter to Regina.

The full interaction lasted six messages and Roblox was not discussed in the final four messages.

The topic strands with the conversational codes can be found in Figure 4.21

Figure 4.21

Addison and Regina's Topic Strands Involving Roblox

125
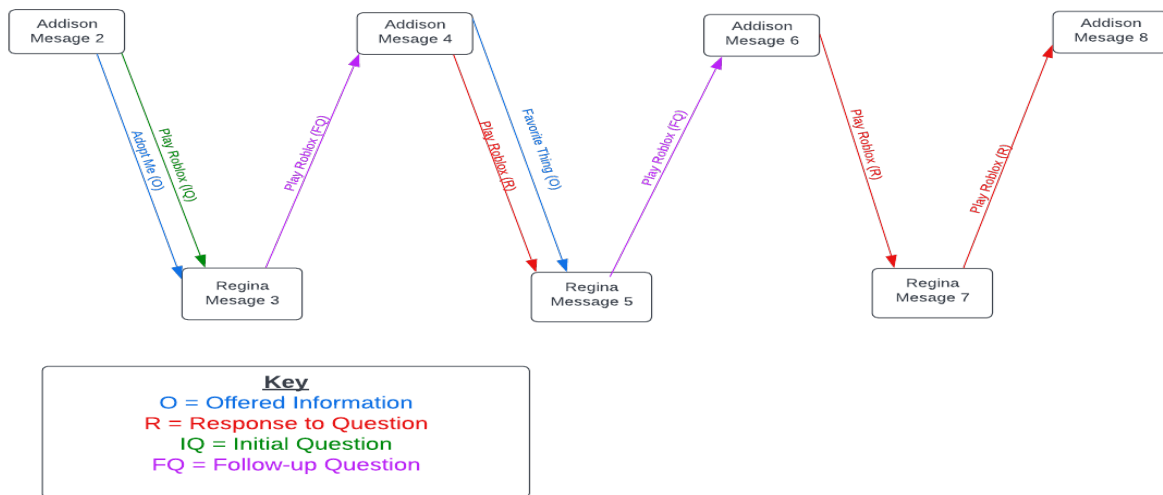
Overall, two topics were discussed regarding Roblox. Addison asked one question to initiate the topic, and Regina asked two questions in her third and fifth messages to continue the correspondence about Roblox. While the correspondence was interactive, the topic diagram shows the correspondence progressed largely with a singular topic with only two topic strands being found in two messages. Comparing this diagram to Jared and Maddux's topic strands involving basketball show fewer connections formed between the participants. The next example of an interaction over a student affinity will be Charlie and Ally's discussion about art.

Charlie and Ally's Correspondence About Art. According to Miss Johnson, Charlie was moderately engaged during virtual learning in most subject areas but was a highly motivated writer. She said his engagement in all subject areas increased during in-person instruction, but he often vocalized his preference for writing. He was paired with Ally who was in her third year with the basketball program and was studying sports management.

Charlie shared his affinity for art in his fourth message by sharing "and my favorite class is art." Ally's lack of affinity for art can be seen in her response when she writes, "I am not very good at art." Table 4.12 shows the full correspondence between Ally and Charlie discussing drawing. Their full correspondence can be found in Appendix P.

Table 4.12

Full Transcript of Charlie and Ally's Correspondence About Art

Message - Participant	Text Involving Art
Message 4 - Charlie	And my favorite class is art.
Message 5 - Ally	Do you have any tips for me on how to draw? I am not very good at Art so I may need your help:)
Message 6 - Charlie	And for a drawing tip believe in yourself and take some tutorials and pause the videos. What was your first drawing?
Message 7 - Ally	Thank you for the drawing tips! The first thing I ever drew was probably a cat but it was not very good:(I will have to look up some videos so I can draw better. What is your favorite thing to draw?
Message 8 - Charlie	It's no problem, I'm always down to help people with drawing. It's ok if the drawing didn't look good, I know I can't draw a cat so it's totally ok. My favorite thing to draw is like movie characters or cartoon characters.
Message 9 - Ally	That is very kind of you to offer help with drawing. I bet you are able to help others in your class too! What kind of cartoon characters do you draw?
Message 10 - Charlie	no problem im always up to help people draw and yes i do help my friends on how to draw heads and using lines to map out faces I like drawing spongebob and the superheroes from movies such as batman and the flash, superman,wonder woman ect.
Message 11 - Ally	You should try and show me one of your Spongebob drawings.

Charlie initiated the correspondence regarding drawing in his second letter to Ally. The correspondence lasted a total of eight messages. Charlie did not talk about art in his final message to Ally. He also did not include a picture of his SpongeBob drawings after Ally requested one in her last message. Figure 4.22 shows the topic strands and conversation codes from Charlie and Ally's correspondence about art.

Figure 4.22

Charlie and Ally's Topic Strands Involving Art

A total of four topics regarding art were discussed. Two were initiated by Charlie and two by Ally. Charlie asked one question to Ally, and Ally asked three extending questions throughout the correspondence. As Figure 4.22 shows Charlie asked one question in the sixth message and then the eighth and tenth messages were entirely replies to Ally's questions.

Characteristics of Correspondence
About a Student Affinity

As was previously discussed, the fifth-grade students asked fewer follow-up questions than their mentors, and when prompted by Miss Johnson they often asked questions about new topics instead of asking questions to continue topics already being discussed. In the partnerships where only the students had an affinity for the topic, interactivity relied on the mentors' interest and asking follow-up questions to the students.

Mentors Asking Follow-up Questions

In the correspondence about topics without a shared affinity the mentors asked significantly more follow-up questions than the students. Figure 4.23 shows the averages for each group of participants.

Figure 4.23

Average Follow-up Questions in Correspondence Without a Shared Affinity
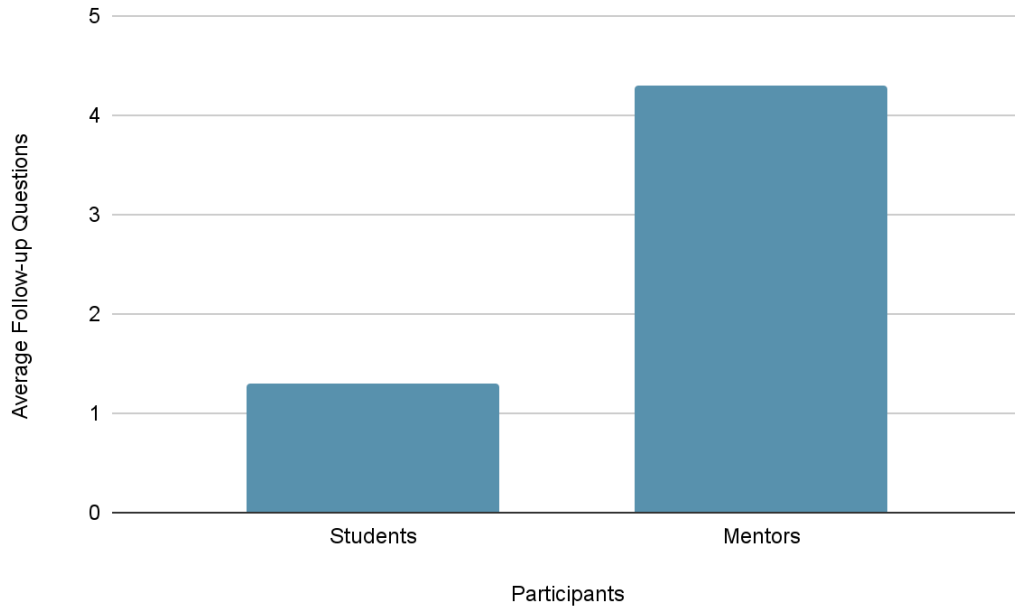
Students only asked 1.3 questions in their most interactive topics while the mentors asked an average of 4.3. The two examples provided in this section illustrate the role of the mentors' questions in continuing the discussion of the topic. In Regina and Addison's correspondence regarding Roblox, Addison only asked Regina one question to initiate the topic. She wrote, "do you play Roblox?" before continuing with her involvement with the game. She does not ask Regina another question regarding the topic throughout the correspondence. Regina asked, "what do you do on that game?" and "what game would be your favorite?" The correspondence about Roblox ended after Regina wrote, "Your roblox games all sound super fun to play and entertaining!" Addison stopped discussing Roblox without a question to respond to.

A similar occurrence happened in Charlie and Ally's correspondence about drawing. Throughout that correspondence Charlie asked Ally one question, "What was your first drawing?" The continued correspondence relied on Ally's follow-up questions. She asked, "Do

130

you have any tips for me on how to draw?"; "What is your favorite thing to draw?"; and "What kind of cartoon characters do you draw?" Like in Addison and Regina's example, the correspondence about drawing ended when Ally did not ask a follow-up question. Continual discussion of the topic depended on the curiosity of the mentors. This pattern was seen in all five discussions where the participants had a one-sided affinity and in all nine of the partnerships where the participants did not have an affinity for the topic.

Mentors Not Asking Follow-up Questions. There were instances in other partnerships where the students shared their interests with their mentors, and the mentors responded but failed to ask a follow-up question. An example of this occurrence can be seen in Becky (student) and Amy (mentor) correspondence. Becky shared her interest in anime. Becky wrote, "I really like anime." Amy responded, "Anime is cool! I personally like comedy shows." This effectively ended the correspondence regarding anime, and Becky didn't ask about Amy's interest in comedy shows. Becky started the topic in a very similar fashion as Charlie when he stated, "my favorite class is art," but because of Amy's lack of follow-up questions the discussion about anime failed to become interactive.

Summary of Research Question 2

In the previous section I provided the findings regarding Research Question 2. Finding 1 discussed the highly interactive communication in the two partnerships with a shared affinity to basketball. Finding 2 discussed the need for the mentors' follow up questions for topics without a shared affinity. To summarize Research Question 2, I compare the interactive correspondence from these two findings. Figure 4.24 shows a comparison of topic diagrams based on the participants' affinity for the topic being discussed. The topic diagrams selected for the comparison serve as representative examples of a typical correspondence in that category.

131

Figure 4.24

Comparison of Topic Diagrams by Participants' Affinity for the Topic Discussed

The participants' shared affinity for the topic led to the highest levels of interactive communication. The two partnerships with a shared affinity for basketball discussed the topic for a greater length of time. The students in these partnerships asked more questions and expanded the correspondence to other basketball-related topics.

Figure 4.24 clearly shows the differences in which participant asked questions and which participant was responding. In the correspondence over a shared affinity, the student's questions to the mentor are influencing the topics. The mentor's third and ninth messages are almost entirely responses to the students' questions. In contrast, in the correspondences over a student affinity or no affinity, the student is providing all the responses to the mentor's questions.

The interactive correspondence that developed over a students' affinity for a topic were shorter in length and contained fewer topic strands compared to the topics with a shared affinity. In the correspondence where only the students had an affinity for the topic, interactivity relied on the mentors' interest and asking of questions. For the topics where neither participant had an affinity were even shorter in length and contained fewer topic strands.

A visual comparison of the topic diagrams shows the greater number of connections between the participants discussing topics they had a shared affinity for. According to Rafaeli's theory, the greater the interactivity, the greater the positive outcomes for the participants such as happiness and motivation (Rafaeli, 1988).

Research Question 3

In the following section I will present the findings from my analysis regarding my third research question.

Q3 How did fifth-graders incorporate images with their written text to communicate virtually with their mentors?

During the correspondence, students had two ways of adding images to their messages. They could either upload an image from the internet or capture an image with their computer camera. In her interview, Miss Johnson mentioned she never instructed students on including images in their messages.

> I reminded them that they could put [images] in, but I never gave any real instruction or guidance into actually doing so. When we were in the classroom, some of the students who didn't know how to put them in asked other students for help.

Overall, 12 of the 16 fifth grade students incorporated at least one image during their correspondence. Brian was the only student to put an image with each of his six messages. In total, the fifth-grade students included 36 images in their 93 messages to their mentors. Twenty-four of the images were copied from the internet, and twelve of them were taken with the camera on the computer. Figure 4.25 shows the number of students' images in each exchange.

Figure 4.25

Number of Images the Students Included with Their Messages.
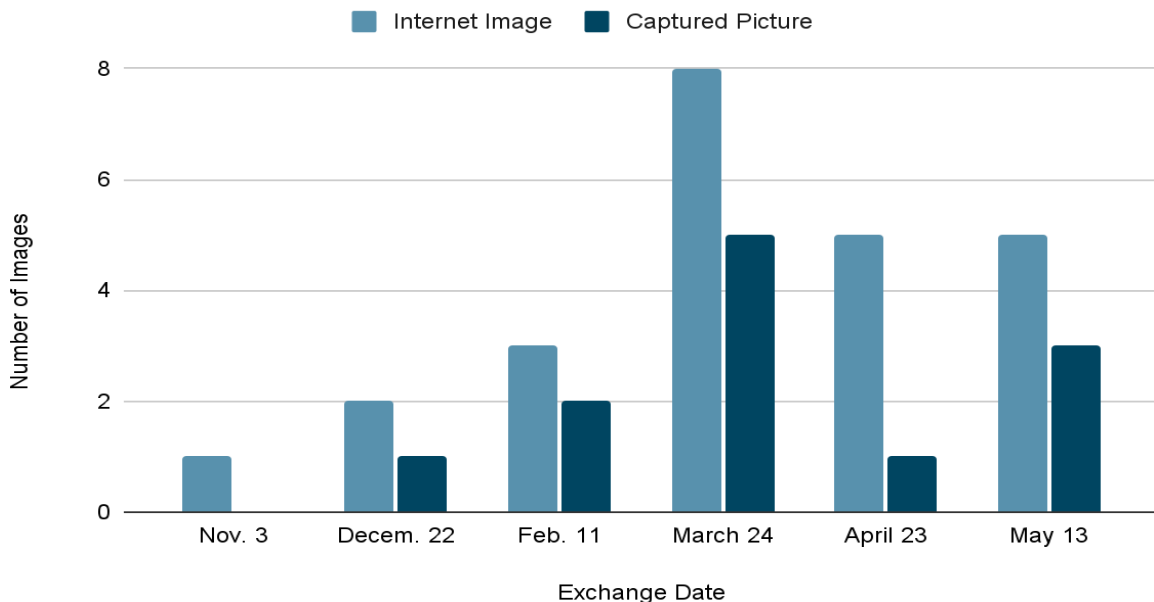
Figure 4.25 shows there was a significant increase in the images included in the final three exchanges when many of the students returned for in-person instruction. As Miss Johnson described, her students had the ability to show each other how to add images at this time. In the March 24 exchange, six new students incorporated an image in their message. The overall increase from a single image in the November 3rd exchange to an average of nine in each of the final three exchanges signifies the fifth-grade students were novice users of images, at least in Google Slides.

To understand the function the images had in the students' messages, I analyzed the students' 36 images using Marsh and White's (2003) Taxonomy of Image and Text Relationships as outlined in Chapter 3. The application of the taxonomy to the students' images led to two findings relevant to Research Question 3.

| Finding 1 | The students enhanced a topic from the text by using images to reiterate their favorite things or provide a sample of their artwork. |
| Finding 2 | The students used images without a close relationship to the text to engage their mentors with their messages. |

The following section will explain how I analyzed the students' use of images using Marsh and White's taxonomy to arrive at these two findings.

Image and Text Relationships

Marsh and White's Taxonomy on Text and Image Relationships is broken down into two stages. The first stage examines the relationship the image has with the text. According to Marsh and White, the image and text can either be closely related, not closely related, or the meaning of the image goes beyond the meaning of the text.

The first step in determining the image and text relationship was to isolate the text associated with each image. In each of their messages, the students discussed an average of 3.8

topics, but the image included with the message only related to one topic. In the eight

occurrences of students adding multiple images to a message, all of them were related to the

same topic. To determine the text that was associated with each image, I used the topic codes

discussed in the previous sections. Using only the text that discussed the same topic as the image,

I determined the function of the image in relation to the text. The frequency of the images

relationship to the text can be found in Figure 4.26

Figure 4.26

Frequency of Students' Images Relationship to the Text
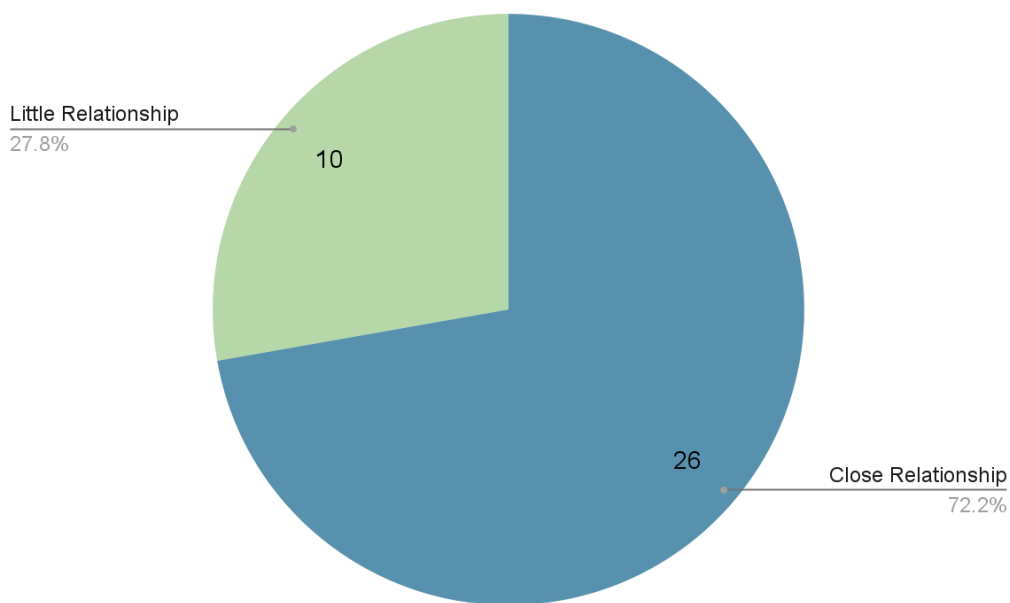
Of the 36 images used by the students, 26 had a close relationship with a portion of their

message, while ten had little relationship to the text. None of the students' images went beyond

the meaning from the text in their messages. According to Marsh and White's taxonomy, images

that go beyond add meaning that the text cannot. For example, modeling a scientific concept.

After determining the relationship, I coded the images according to the 49 functions found in the

second stage of Marsh and White's taxonomy. These results will be discussed next.

Function of Students' Images in the Message

While Marsh and White's taxonomy includes 49 functions, the students only used images for five of these functions. The frequency of the functions can be found in Figure 4.27.

Figure 4.27

Frequency of the Function of the Students' Images
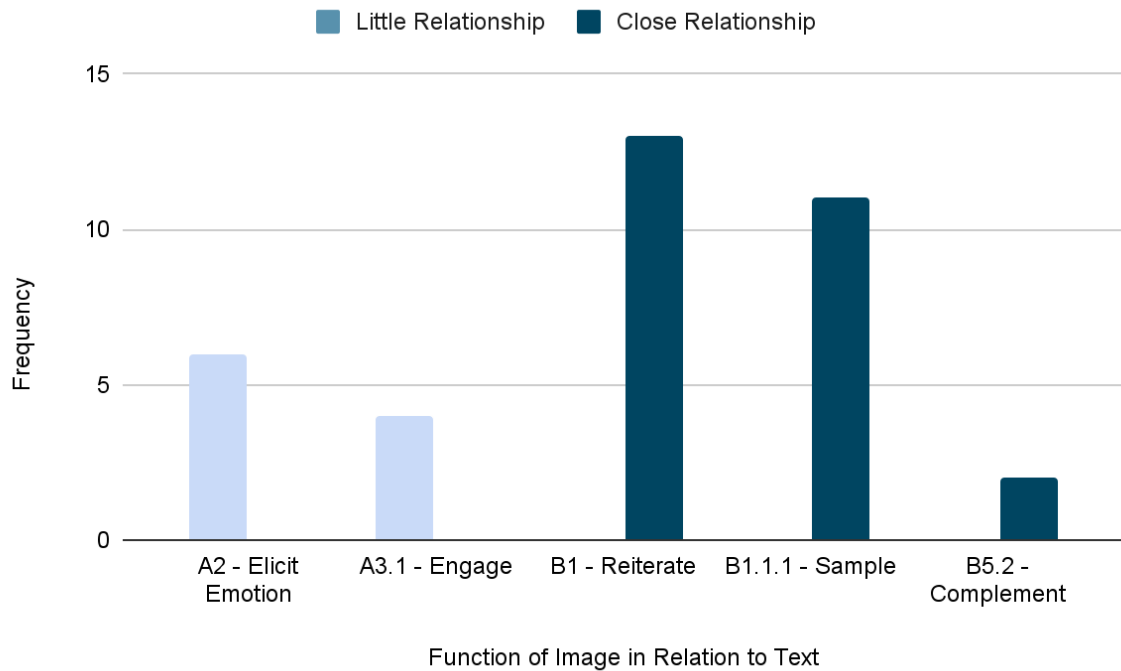
To answer Research Question 3, I will discuss the four most used functions of students' images in order of their frequency. As Figure 4.27 shows, the most common function of the students' images was to reiterate a topic from the text. Marsh and White define images that reiterate the text as restating the message with little change or interpretation (2003). Thirteen of the students' 36 images were used by the students to reiterate a topic. The second most common function of the image was to provide a sample of the text. Marsh and White define sample images as those that give a sense of a concept by providing an example. Eleven of the 36 images

provided a sample of a topic from the message. These two most common uses by the students will be explored in Finding 1.

Figure 4.27 also shows six of the images with little relation to the text were used to elicit emotion from the mentors, and four were used to specifically engage their mentors. These images will be discussed in Finding 2.

Finding 1: The Students Enhanced a Topic From the Text by Using Images to Reiterate Their Favorite Things or Provide a Sample of Their Artwork

The two most common functions of the images with a close relationship to the text was to reiterate a topic or to provide a sample of a topic. Both functions will be explored in this section.

Images That Reiterated Favorite Things

The most common function of the students' images was to reiterate a single topic from the text. Figure 4.28 shows the frequency of the topics that students reiterated.

Figure 4.28

Frequency of Topics Reiterated with the Students' Images

138
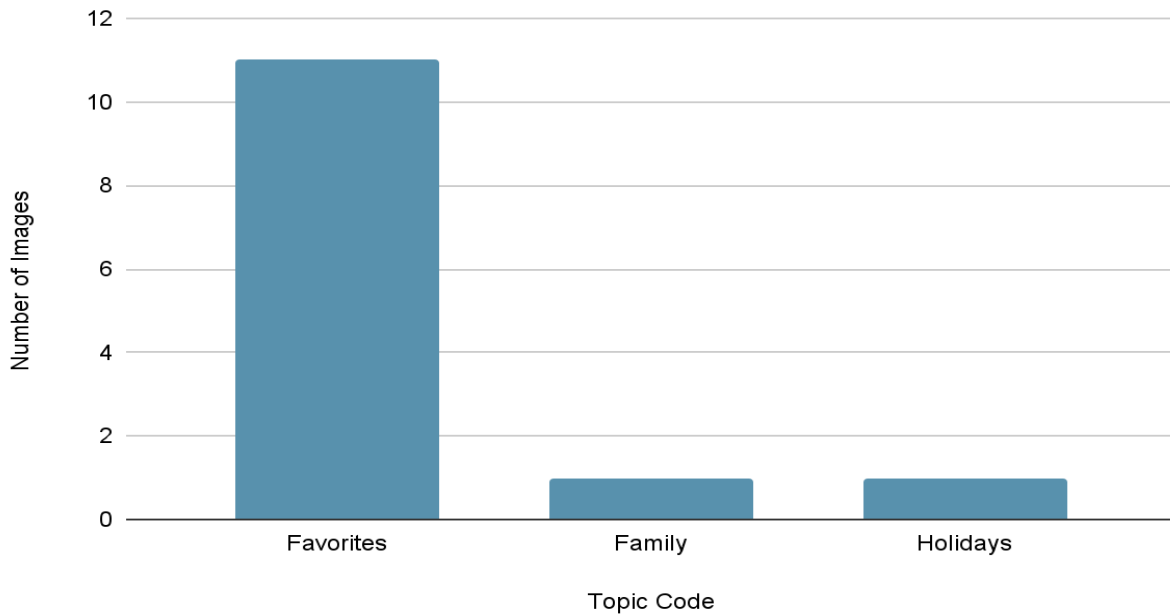
Eleven of the thirteen images used by students to reiterate a topic were providing a visual of something from the text that was their favorite. Using the image to reiterate a singular topic enhanced that specific topic from the other topics discussed in the message to the mentors. To explore this function of the students' images, I will present three representative examples from the eleven images that reiterated the students' favorite things. The examples were selected to show the similarities in the students' use of images and differences in the mentors' response to them.

Julie's Images of Her Favorite Tik Tok Stars. In her April 24 message, Julie wrote to Regina, "my favrite tik toker is Lilhuddy and charil d'amelio. The dances that i know from tik tok is foot fungus, up, rake it up, hey boy. Some other tik tok dances." With her message she included two images of Lilhiddy and Charil D'Amelio. Julie's full April 24th message can be found in Figure 4.29.

Figure 4.29

Julie's Message with Images of Her Favorite TikTok Stars

In this message, Julie uses two images to reiterate her favorite Tik Tokers. The images provide a visual restatement of the two people she discussed. By including these two images, she brings attention to this part of her text over others in her message. Regina responded to Julie's message about Tik Tok in her following message. In response to the images Regina replied, "I have not seen lil huddie on tik tok but I have seen charlie dance! She's really good!"

In her message to Regina, Julie also discussed her Easter with her family. Julie had the opportunity to include an image that would have reiterated those parts of her message, but she chose to enhance the part of her message that discussed her favorite Tik Tok stars. This pattern of reiterating the students' favorite things to enhance the topic from the rest of the message occurs in all the other ten instances. Two more examples will be discussed below.

Cesar's Image of His Favorite Restaurant. Another example of a student using an image to reiterate their favorite thing occurred in Cesar and Claire's correspondence. In his March 24th message Cesar wrote, "What i did for my birthday is i went to my favorite restaurant which is Texas Road House." He included an image of a Texas Road House building.

Similar to Julie's example, Cesar picks his favorite thing from the message to reiterate with the image. He enhanced the topic of his favorite restaurant. While Claire responded to Cesar's birthday questions, she also specifically responded to the part of the message regarding Texas Road House. In the following message Claire responded, "Texas Road House I think has the best bread and butter! Yuuuuuummmmmyyyy!"

Maddux's Image of His Favorite Shoes. When students included images to reiterate their favorite things, it did not always lead to a response from the mentor. Maddux wrote in his March 24th message, "my favorite types of shoes is jordans 11." With this message Maddux included an image of the Jordan shoes.

Maddux discussed many topics in his message but chose to reiterate the portion of the text talking about his favorite shoes. Providing the visual restatement of the topic enhanced it over the others in the message, but in her following message Connie did not comment on Maddux's favorite shoes. This example shows that when the students enhanced their favorite things it did not automatically mean that topic would get a response from their mentors.

Providing Samples of Artwork

Figure 4.27 shows the second most common function of the student's images was to provide a sample of a topic from the text. Eleven of these twelve images were used by three students, Terrance, Brian, and Cesar, to show their mentors pictures of their artwork they had created. In these eleven occurrences, the students mentioned their art in the text and included an image taken with the computer camera and uploaded. Like the previous section, I will provide three examples to show how the students used images in this way along with the differences in their mentors' responses.

Terrance's Image of His Drawing. In Terrance's December 22nd message he wrote, "And do you like to draw or color? I do." He included the image found in Figure 4.30 along with this message.

Figure 4.30

Terrance's Message with an Image of His Artwork

Dear Amy

Hi you asked me a question about do you have any pet and no I don't but I wished I had a cat as my pet and the question about how long have I been in the in the U.S don't know sorry but Nouth pack bulldogs was my second school I went to my first school when i was eight now I will talk about my Thanksgiving we had turkey for the feast and presence and that's it and what are you doing for Christmas? And do you like to draw or color? I do.

Hope to see you letter soon.

Terrance

In this example, Terrance states that he likes to draw and color and includes a picture to provide a sample of his artwork. Like the images used to reiterate a topic from the message, providing a sample of his artwork enhanced the topic of drawing compared to the other topics discussed in his message. Terrance could have included an image to enhance the topic of pets or holidays, which he discussed, but he chose his artwork. His mentor, Amy, responded to his artwork by writing, "The dragon looks amazing! You are a very good artist. What do you use to color your dragon?" Amy includes a question with her response, creating an opportunity for interactive communication about drawing.

Cesar's Image of His Drawing. Cesar provides another example of a student using images to share his artwork with his mentor. In his April 23rd message Cesar wrote, "Also if you look at the picture below you can see what i drew. do you like to draw if you do what do you draw?" He included the image found in Figure 4.31 with this message.

Figure 4.31

Cesar's Message with an Image of His Artwork

Hello Claire

For spring break i was really just
At my house and i was playing electronics but
I went to my grandmas for easter and when i went for a
Easter egg hunt all the eggs had money so i got ten dollars.
What did you do for easter? Also if you look at the pictures
below you can see what i drew. do you like to draw if you
do what do you draw? How is college? How long is it to
finish college being a basketball player?

Hope to hear from
you soon.

Cesar

Like the previous examples, Cesar has a choice of which topic he wanted to enhance with an image. In his message he discusses playing electronics, Easter activities, and drawing. In her follow-up message, Claire wrote, "You are really good at drawing! I like to doodle and sometimes paint."

Brian's Image of His Drawing. Like when students incorporated images about their favorites, adding an image of their drawing didn't necessarily mean the mentors would respond. An example of this can be seen in Brian's December 22nd message to Carrie. In this message Brian states, "I like to draw" and includes a sample of his drawing. Figure 4.32 shows this message.

Figure 4.32

Brian's Message with an Image of His Artwork

Again, Brian discusses a multitude of topics in his message, but enhances the topic of drawing by incorporating an image. Even though he did this, Carrie did not comment on his artwork in her response.

Summary of Finding 1

Of the 26 images with a close relationship with the text the two most common uses were to reiterate a student's favorite thing and provide a sample of the students' artwork. While these images did not alter the text related to them, they enhanced a singular topic from text. Enhancing the topic by restating it or providing an example did not guarantee a response from the mentors as they failed to respond to all images.

**Finding 2: The Students Used Images Without
a Close Relationship to the Text to
Engage Their Mentors**

Ten of the images used by students had little relationship to the text. These ten images were used to engage their mentor in two different ways. Six of the images attempted to engage

the mentors by what Marsh and White label *eliciting emotion*. These six images used humor that could appeal to a wider audience. The remaining four images used to engage the mentor, did so by directly appealing to the students' mentor. The images used to engage the mentors will be covered in the following section.

Images Used to Engage Mentors with Humor

Six of the images used by students to engage their mentors did so with the use of humor. Marsh and White categorized this function as eliciting emotion with the image. While they discuss this function typically with a sad or disturbing image, the same function can be accomplished with humor. These images did not have a close relationship to the text, and the images did not have a specific connection to the mentors. Isaiah's use of humorous images will be discussed as an example of this function of images.

Isaiah's Use of Humorous Images. An example of a student using humor to engage their mentor can be found in Isaiah's third and final messages to his mentor Claire. Figure 4.33 shows Isaiah's third message to Claire.

Figure 4.33

Isaiah's Message with an Image of Patrick
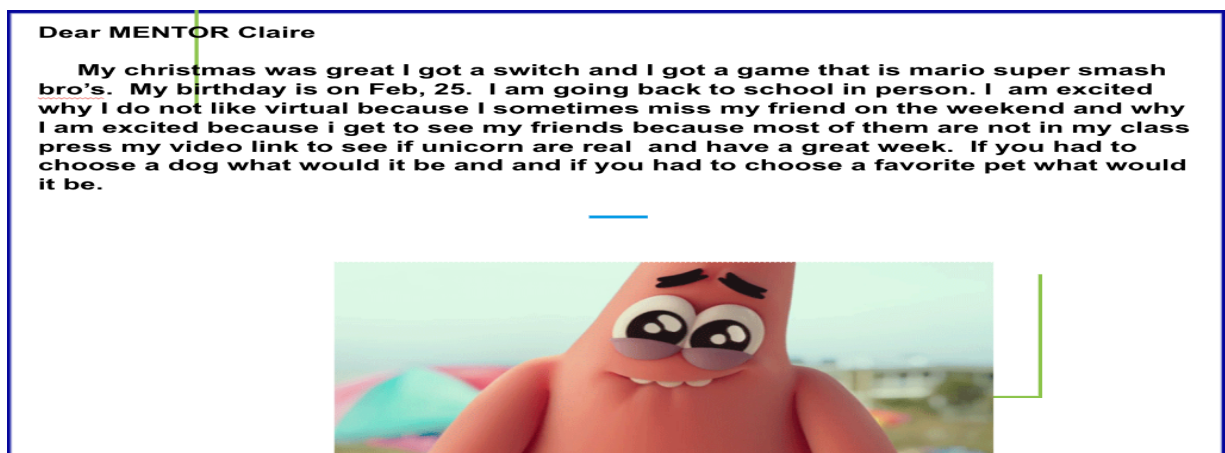
In Figure 4.33 Isaiah included a picture of Patrick from the cartoon SpongeBob SquarePants. The text included with the message does not refer to any topics related to SpongeBob or cartoons in general. Isaiah did not refer to SpongeBob in any of his correspondence. While one could infer that the inclusion of the image could constitute it being an interest of his and incorporating it could be seen as an extension of the message, a review of Isaiah's other messages reveals a pattern of adding unrelated images. Figure 4.34 shows the image of cartoon food included by Isaiah.

Figure 4.34

Isaiah's Message with an Image of Cartoon Food
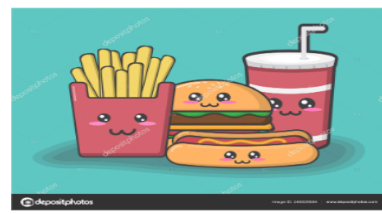
Again, there is no mention of the cartoon food in Isaiah and Claire's correspondence. The inclusion of the image is not targeted to Claire in any specific way. Isaiah may have an interest in these characters, but he does not discuss them in any way. He includes these images because he thinks they are entertaining and will engage his mentor.

Four of the students included images that were specifically used to engage their mentors with their message. These images did not connect to the written message and would not have a connection to another reader. To illustrate this finding, I will provide two examples of these types of images.

Jared's Image of Peanut Butter Cups. Jared provides an example of a student using an image to specifically engage his mentor. In his March 24th message, Jared included an image of peanut butter cups with his message. Figure 4.35 shows Jared's March 24th message to Connie.

Figure 4.35

Jared's Message with an Image of Reese's Peanut Butter Cups

> Dear Connie,
>
> Hi ! i haven't talked to you in a long time how are you doing im doing fine i think i got better at basketball have you? curry sill in the league lebron is mad lebron is going to be on space jam you should watch it in perso school is great i like my teacher can you give me some advice from you team and you and i think curry is doing good living the the rich life talk to you later
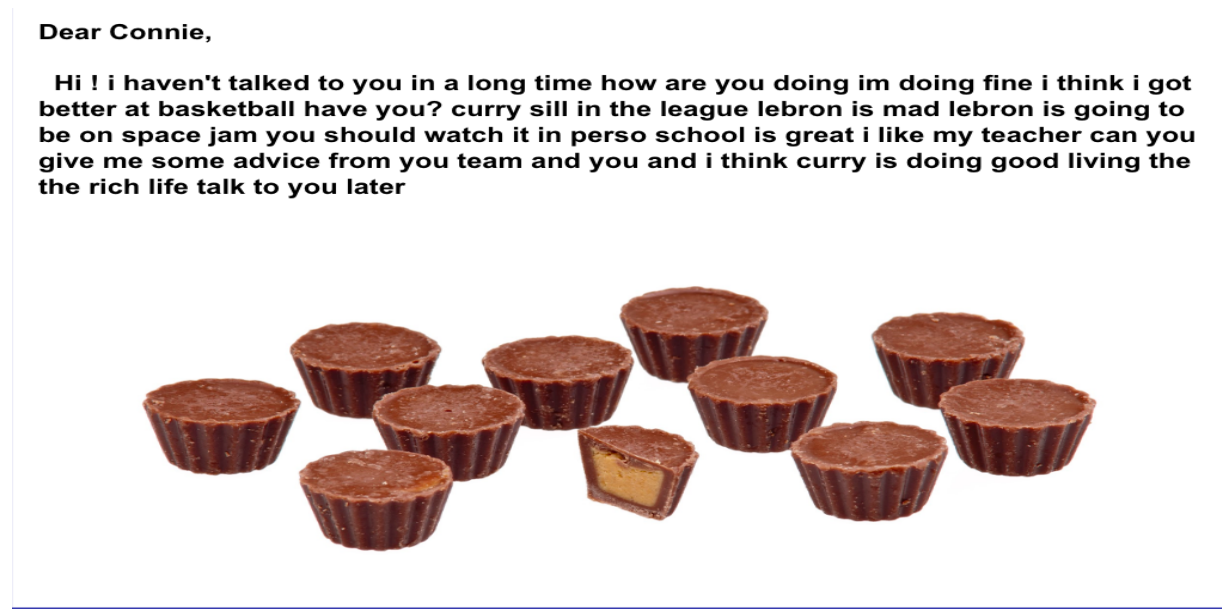
In this message, Jared did not mention candy or Reese's Peanut Butter Cups in his written text. While Jared did not mention Reese's Peanut Butter Cups in his message, Connie mentioned, "My favorite candy is Reese's Peanut Butter Cups" in her second message to Jared. Because of this, the use of the image served to engage Connie with Jared's text. He knew it was her favorite candy and including the image in a later slide would signal to Connie of the relationship they

were forming. In this instance, the image served to specifically engage Connie, and its inclusion would be a mystery for any other reader of the message. Although the image was included to directly appeal to Connie, she did not comment on it in her next message to Jared.

Becky's Image of Anime Basketball Team. Becky provides another example of a fifth-grader using an image to specifically engage their mentor. In her final message to Courtney, Becky made the background of her message an image of an anime basketball team. This message can be found in Figure 4.36.

Figure 4.36

Becky's Message with an Image of an Anime Basketball Team

Becky did not discuss the image in the text sent with the message. In a previous message, Becky wrote, "i like anime." Throughout the discussion she never talks about basketball. Her inclusion of a basketball anime picture is targeted directly at her mentor, Courtney, who she knew played basketball. Of all the anime pictures she could have included, she picked one that

she knew showed Courtney's interest to engage her in the message. The image was included in Becky's final message to Courtney, so she did not have the opportunity to reply to the image.

Summary of Finding 2

The students included ten images that did not have a close relationship to the text. These images were used to engage their mentors. Four of the images were included to specifically engage the mentors while the remaining six used humorous images that could engage a larger audience of readers.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

In Chapter 1, I presented the problems experienced by students when schools narrow their literacy focus to the targets found on federally mandated standardized tests (Au, 2007; Rowsell et al., 2017). In failing to expand literacy instruction to reflect the communicative practices in society, schools are not addressing the participation gap found between those individuals with the competencies to participate in today's digital social and economic worlds and those without (Jenkins, 2009). Schools failing to provide support in digital modes of communication disadvantages marginalized students who do not receive support at home navigating these new technologies. The negative outcomes associated with the participation gap could be seen during the Covid-19 pandemics when marginalized students suffered the greatest disruption in their ability to participate during virtual learning (Tsekova, 2020).

In Chapter 1, I also discussed the goal of this qualitative research was to understand the experiences of the participants during their virtual interactions. Understanding the participants' experiences will help educators situate their literacy instruction in communicative contexts. The case allowed for the opportunity to study three research questions.

Q1   How did Miss Johnson facilitate the virtual correspondence between her fifth-grade students and their college mentors?

Q2   What contributed to high levels of interactive communication during written correspondence between the fifth-grade students and their college mentors?

Q3   How did fifth-graders incorporate images with their written text to communicate virtually with their mentors?

In Chapter 2, I presented the theoretical framework of authentic literacy pedagogy and the relevant research associated with the study. The research showed that while authentic literacy experiences were more motivating for students, there was inconclusive evidence that the motivation led to literacy growth (Bleck, 2013; Bonyadi, 2014; Bridgeman et al., 1997). I also discussed the theories on virtual interactivity occurring during computer-mediated communication showing that interactive communication can be viewed as a continuum with communication being more or less interactive (Cover, 2006; McGrail & Behizadeh, 2017; Rafaeli, 1988). I finished Chapter 2 by discussing the benefits researchers found from student pen pal exchanges and virtual mentorships occurring through digital means of communication (Alvermann et al., 2012; Gee, 2015; Lemkuhl, 2002; Magnifico, 2010; McMillon, 2009). The theories and relevant literature discussed in Chapter 2 will be revisited in this chapter to help discuss the implications of the findings from the case study.

In Chapter 3, I discussed how the case study methodology would lead to a better understanding of the research questions. The case study methodology fit with this research because all the communication between the participants was clearly bounded from regular classroom discourse. Employing qualitative case study methods allowed me to incorporate the unique context in which the communication occurred. Covid-19 quarantines greatly influenced the participants and being able to include this context into the study was essential to understand their experiences. In Chapter 3, I also outlined the data collection and analysis procedures that led to the findings in Chapter 4.

In Chapter 4, I presented the findings of the case study. These findings will be reviewed in this chapter as I discuss the larger implications of them. The implication of these findings,

organized by each research question, will be discussed next. Following the implications, I

discuss the limitations of this study and end with recommendations for further research.

<div align="center">**Implications**</div>

As discussed in Chapter 2, there is an educational debate on the effectiveness of authentic

literacy experiences for students. While some argue relevancy is essential for literacy to be

meaningful for students (Erickson & Wharton-McDonald, 2019; Gee, 2004; Kalantzis & Cope,

2023; Rothfusz, 2020), others argue the natural process of language acquisition is too slow and

can be circumnavigated through direct literacy skill instruction (Assessor et al., 2002; Lee,

1987). This case study provided a unique opportunity to explore the outcomes of authentic

literacy practices to add to the conversation regarding the benefits of authentic practices in

schools.

Research Question 1

The following section will discuss the implications of the findings regarding my first

research question.

Q1   How did Miss Johnson facilitate the virtual correspondence between her fifth-
        grade students and their college mentors?

Miss Johnson's class was composed of a diverse group of students from different racial

and socioeconomic backgrounds. When schools were forced to rely on virtual instruction during

the Covid-19 quarantines, most of her young students were unfamiliar with the new

technologies, unable to access instructional resources, and did not have the skills to participate in

synchronous or asynchronous environments. While most students struggled, they received

drastically different levels of support from a more knowledgeable adult. A few of Miss

Johnson's students, from families with the economic resources to have in-home adult

supervision, had support both in how to use virtual learning programs and with accountability for

their schoolwork. But most of her students came from lower SES households where adults could not be at home, and students had no support or accountability. In fact, many of Miss Johnson's students supervised younger siblings' virtual learning. This disparity seen in Miss Johnson's classroom provides an example of the participation gap experienced by marginalized students (Jenkins, 2009), and highlights the role schools have in providing support with information and communications technology (ICT) for all students.

Without in-home, adult support during virtual learning, Miss Johnson had very little to motivate her students to complete any academic work they did not want to do. Her school district did not alter their curricular resources, and she was expected to continue instructing her students with academic genre writing. After years of experience struggling to get students to engage with writing during in-person instruction, Miss Johnson knew she would have to develop literacy experiences that would motivate her students to want to write from home. My analysis of the partnership found that to motivate her students to participate in the mentorship Miss Johnson framed the mentors as the audience, allowed her students to choose their own topics, and provided feedback focused on interactions in lieu of writing mechanics. These instructional choices were in line with what Behizadeh (2014) found led to students perceiving writing assignments as more authentic. Behizadeh (2014) found that if the writing task allowed for student topic choice, is shared with an audience, and the audience provides feedback that doesn't focus on writing mechanics the students will think the writing task is more authentic. By increasing the authenticity of the writing for the mentorship compared to classroom writing assignments, Miss Johnson increased her students' motivation to participate in the written exchanges. This motivation to participate was essential during the Covid-19 quarantines when

153

there was extremely low academic accountability for marginalized students. This section will discuss the implications of the motivation from Miss Johnson's authentic literacy experience.

Authentic Literacy Experience

At the heart of Miss Johnsons' authentic literacy experience was the mentors serving as an audience from outside of the classroom. Research has shown when communicating with people from outside the classroom, students feel a higher sense of purpose in their writing and have a stronger dedication to complete the writing task (Chen & Brown, 2011; Kessler, 2005; Spanke & Paul, 2015; Wiggins, 2009). In this case, the mentors serving as the authentic audience for the students' writing provided real world accountability leading to similar positive outcomes. If a fifth-grade student failed to write their message, their mentor would not receive a letter and the students would not receive a response. The students' reflections showed that they were excited to receive the letters back. This excitement, and desire to share in their classmates' excitement, provided motivation to participate in the exchanges.

The mentors also provided real-world accountability in ensuring the messages were comprehensible. This aligns with other studies' findings that when students wrote for pen pal exchanges, they were highly motivated to communicate effectively (Gambrell et al., 2011; Walker-Dalhouse et al., 2009). The students expressed concerns about whether their mentors would be able to understand their messages knowing the mentors had to rely on their writing to maintain communication. This is juxtaposed with their writing for Miss Johnson. Brian expressed his nonchalance with his classroom writing because Miss Johnson "just has to tell us if we are right or wrong." Brian's quote points to not caring about the corrective feedback as much as if his mentor can understand his message.

While researchers have shown that communicating with an authentic audience leads students to care about proper writing mechanics (Chen & Brown, 2011; Kessler, 2005; Spanke & Paul, 2015; Wiggins, 2009), this was not seen in the students' writing for the mentorship. Throughout the exchanges the students' messages were riddled with grammatical and spelling errors shown by Google's red and blue underlines. Even though the mentors provided a heightened sense of accountability for the students to complete their messages and make sure they could be understood, they did not motivate the students to improve their writing mechanics.

Miss Johnson also increased the authenticity of the literacy experience by allowing her students freedom with regards to the content of the messages. Writing about topics that interested the students was motivating because the mentors were an audience from outside of the classroom. Miss Johnson implemented dialogue journals in the past to write about social topics with her students, but they did not motivate her students to write in the same way as writing to the mentors did. She described how the discussions in the dialogue journals always seemed to veer towards school-related topics. Julie reflected on dialogue journals with Miss Johnson. In her interview she said, "Why would we write to Miss Johnson when we can just tell her what we want to say." The mentors as an audience from outside the classroom greatly added to the students' motivation to write about topics valued by the students compared to writing to Miss Johnson.

While the mentors provided real-world accountability to motivate the students to complete their messages, there were characteristics in their writing that signaled they were struggling to attend to their audience. The students often needed reminders to answer questions from their mentors' previous message, and they didn't ask follow-up questions about topics their mentors were discussing. Research has shown that while beginning writers have shown signs of

audience awareness, often considerations regarding the audience are lacking in their writing (Solomon, 2010). This could be due to their focus being on generating the text and not on adapting their ideas to the audience (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). The following section will discuss how Miss Johnson helped students attend to their audience and interact with their mentors.

Supporting Interactive Communication

Miss Johnson created an open space for interactions between her students and their mentors, but she also maintained expectations for her students' writing. Her instructions required students to respond to their mentors, ask questions, and discuss new topics. Because her students were struggling to attend to their audience, Miss Johnson focused on supporting interactions with her instructions and feedback. Her aim for focusing on interactions was for her students to develop relationships that would provide socioemotional support and motivate them to write during remote instruction. Analysis found her feedback got her students to expand their messages and interact with their mentors.

Miss Johnson had to be strategic with her feedback. She did not want to be too critical, causing her students to think the writing was for an assignment. By pointing out what they missed from her checklist, Miss Johnson was providing negative correction feedback which has been found to diminish the motivation for students to participate (Behizadeh, 2014; Long, 1996). While research has found that students are more engaged with the revision process when communicating with an authentic audience (Gambrell et al., 2011; Walker-Dalhouse et al., 2009), when Miss Johnson gave her students feedback, they added her suggestions to the end of their message. They did not revise and incorporate the feedback throughout the message. Adding the revisions to the end of the message signaled the students were reluctant to add the feedback.

Similar to not providing corrective feedback on writing mechanics, Miss Johnson had to determine how hard she could push her students without demotivating them from participating in the exchanges.

Research Question 1 Conclusion

The authentic writing task motivated students to participate in written communication when academic accountability was low during remote instruction. Miss Johnson's instructional decisions focused on increasing participation which is the first step to acquisition of the skills needed to communicate virtually. Students got experience relying on technological modes of communication to develop relationships. For many students, just as was with many adults during the pandemic, this was the first time using these platforms.

Opponents of authentic literacy experiences argue they do not lead to literacy growth needed for the demands of standardized tests and the writing curriculum aligned with these tests (Assessor et al., 2002; Newmann et al., 1996). Writing for social purposes does not align with these demands but attempting to incorporate academic literacy targets and corrective feedback into the correspondence would have diminished students' motivation to participate. While participation did not necessarily lead to academic literacy development, lack of participation would have limited some of the benefits of expression and identity that will be discussed further during Research Question 2.

Research Question 2

The following section will discuss the implications of the findings regarding my second research question.

> Q2   What contributed to high levels of interactive communication during written correspondence between the fifth-grade students and their college mentors?

Miss Johnson sought interactive correspondence with her students and their mentors because she felt they would develop relationships that would motivate her students to write while simultaneously providing them with socioemotional support. Rafaeli and Sudweeks (2006) posit that highly interactive communication leads to the same outcomes sought by Miss Johnson. Although Miss Johnson aimed to initiate interactive correspondence, analysis found that her feedback only promoted reactive communication. Fully interactive correspondence was determined by the participants. As presented in Chapter 4, Maddux and Jared's correspondences with Connie were the only two partnerships to discuss a shared affinity. This shared affinity led to some profound outcomes for the participants, and the implications of them will be discussed next.

Correspondence About a Shared Affinity

The highest levels of interactive correspondence, according to Rafaeli's (1988) theory, occurred in the two partnerships that connected over basketball. These two correspondences were unique in their immediate connection over a shared interest. In these partnerships the students had a heightened motivation to write about a topic of interest with an interactive audience who shared that interest. This heightened motivation led to monumental changes in Jared and Maddux. Miss Johnson commented there were entire weeks when Jared would only login for classroom instruction to see if his mentor wrote back. The writing for the mentorship was some of the only writing Miss Johnson received from these students throughout the entire year.

Jared and Maddux's level of motivation to participate in the exchanges is on par with that studied by participants in online affinity spaces. Affinity spaces are described as "locations where groups of people are drawn together because of a shared, strong interest or engagement in a

158

common activity" (Gee, 2015). Engaging in these spaces has been shown to be highly motivating for participants. Research into an online affinity space involving *The Hunger Games* trilogy found that even though students had read the novels several times, they continued to participate in discussions regarding themes and characters while creating their own fanfiction stories (Curwood, 2013). Jared and Maddux had no adult supervision during remote instruction and therefore no accountability to participate. Like the participants in *The Hunger Games* affinity space, their desire to communicate with their mentor about basketball was completely self-motivated. For them, being able to write about basketball was not viewed as an academic task, but rather a social activity that provided them great satisfaction.

Researchers have not been able to replicate the level of desire to participate in affinity spaces in academic contexts. In a study trying to replicate affinity spaces with academic content, researchers found it did not lead to an increased level of participation (Lammers, 2016). When students were given a choice of different learning communities involving the course content, students expressed excitement for the different learning opportunities but were not self-motivated to participate as in personal affinity spaces. It has been argued that students will never experience the level of motivation found in affinity spaces in academic contexts, because they do not see any connection between any kind of schoolwork and their personal goals and interests" (Assessor et al., 2002). Compared to Lammers' attempt at incorporating affinity spaces, Miss Johnsons' pen pal correspondence allowed students to correspond about their personal interests. The literacy experience was completely removed from academic content. Forcing Jared and Maddux to correspond with Connie about any other topic than basketball would not have yielded the same motivation to participate.

Analysis of Jared and Maddux's exchange leads me to agree with Gee (2015) that the level of motivation found in affinity spaces creates the ideal learning environment, but at the same time educators must get students to engage with the academic curriculum. Finding ways to bridge students' interests to academic content to harness the level of engagement found in affinity spaces would drastically increase the motivation for all students, but particularly benefit those most disengaged.

Interactive Correspondence About Students' Affinity

Examination of the correspondence found that most of the students and their mentors did not share an affinity for the topics they discussed. This is understandable given the age difference of the participants. In these cases, interactive correspondence relied on the mentors asking follow-up questions to continue the discussion of topics the students were interested in. As discussed in Chapter 4, these partnerships were less interactive than the correspondence involving basketball, but still provided benefits to the students. Most notably, the mentors continuing the correspondence by asking questions, put the students in a role where they were an expert in their interests. This practice valued the students' background knowledge, a practice necessary for authentic writing practices (Behizadeh, 2014).

Students' life experiences contribute to the background knowledge they bring to the classroom. This background knowledge has been called their funds of knowledge (González et al., 2005). Funds of knowledge theorists argue that students bring with them knowledge connected to their identities from living and interacting with the world. They argue teachers need to activate and draw upon these funds of knowledge to value their home experiences. Interacting with an authentic audience, about topics of their choosing, tapped into the students' funds of knowledge allowing them to discuss their family, hobbies, and experiences during quarantine.

While Miss Johnson allowed for topic choice in genre writing assignments, it did not have the same effect as topic choice for communicative purposes. For classroom genre writing, students were allowed to pick a topic that would meet the aims of the assignment which might not connect to their personal lives. Whereas the social correspondence allowed the students to discuss their lives outside of the classroom. Opportunities to bridge home and school lives during literacy experiences are important for valuing the students' backgrounds and increasing the authenticity of the writing task (Behizadeh, 2014; González et al., 2005). Even if the mentors did not have shared experiences as the students, there was value for the students when sharing their lives with an authentic audience who showed interest and asked about them.

Research Question 2 Conclusion

The correspondence over a shared affinity led to the motivation to communicate that Miss Johnson was seeking when facilitating the mentorship. The heightened motivation from discussing a topic of deep personal interest with an interactive audience caused students to participate in the mentorship during a time they disregarded all other academic activities. Gee (2015) described the self-motivation to create and interact with others in affinity spaces as the "ideal learning environment." Examination of Jared and Maddux's participation in the mentorship corroborates this notion. The motivation found in these two students throughout the exchanges has incredible educational implications, particularly for disengaged, marginalized students. Educators must find ways to get students' interests into the curriculum while scaffolding meaningful literacy experiences to increase their participation in academic contexts. Finding authentic audiences with shared affinities of their students is a difficult task for educators. Exploring already developed affinity spaces online could alleviate the need for the personalized audience found in this case study.

This is not to say there is no benefit in connecting students to authentic audiences without a shared affinity. These relationships provided the opportunity for students to interact about their home experiences in ways that helped to bridge their academic and home lives. Miss Johnson allowing for topic choice provided the opportunity for students to bring their background knowledge and experiences into the classroom. While it is impractical to allow for complete freedom in topic choice in all classroom literacy experiences, students must be given some opportunities to bridge their academic and home lives.

Research Question 3

The following section will discuss the implications of the findings regarding my third research question.

Q3   How did fifth-graders incorporate images with their written text to communicate virtually with their mentors?

Corresponding through Google Slides allowed the students to include images with their messages. About a third of the students' overall messages included an image. Miss Johnson did not provide instruction on multimodal composition. She didn't even instruct students how to add images to their slides. Although she discussed wanting her students to experiment with designing multimodal messages, she never instructed them on how to do it. Analysis found there was a significant increase in the number of students who included images in the March 6th exchange. This coincided with the first message that took place when most of the students were together in the classroom. Miss Johnson commented that students were helping each other include images with their messages.

Miss Johnson could have provided instruction with the use of images, instead she chose to have students acquire the skills to include images themselves. In failing to provide instruction for incorporating images with the messages, Miss Johnson favored the written word during

162

communication. This was for a few reasons. First, her focus for the mentorship was to get students to communicate through writing with their mentors. While writing for communicative purposes was not found in her writing curriculum or on standardized assessments, she felt the writing would serve as general practice for academic writing demands. Using images, on the other hand, was not found in her writing curriculum or on standardized assessments (Vasudevan et al., 2010). Also, Miss Johnson thought instructing her students in how to use images would get them to not focus on writing. This wouldn't necessarily have been true as research has shown that focusing on multimodality does not force students to abandon traditional writing skills (Selfe, 2007; Wang, 2022). Finally, Miss Johnson didn't instruct her students on how to include images because she had never received any training in multimodal composition. Similar to how teachers target their literacy instruction to meet the writing demands found on standardized tests, schools prioritize their professional development around the targets of the tests (Hubbard, 2008). Research has shown that professional development has been effective in addressing teacher misconceptions regarding multimodal composition and developing their understanding for how to incorporate it into their instruction (Powell et al., 2015).

Scaffolding Multimodal Composition

Scaffolding multimodal composition is much more involved than teaching students how to upload images from the internet. As discussed in Chapter 2, the transition from print media to the screen now allows for new affordances while communicating with text images, videos, and an array of design choices (Gee & Hayes, 2011; Kalantzis et al., 2003; Kress, 2003; Lankshear & Knobel, 2013). Scaffolding multimodal composition involves not only understanding the affordances of different meaning-making resources, but also how they work together to produce a coherent multimodal text (Lim, 2018). Miss Johnson's writing curriculum didn't include these

tenets of multimodal composition, and instructing her students with this would have been completely new for her and her students.

Without curricular resources, Miss Johnson could have used the mentors' messages to examine their use of available semiotic resources. Miss Johnson noted that a few students imitated their mentors' slide design, signifying they were looking for examples for their own creations. One approach to instructing students in multimodal composition could have been through conducting systemic functional multimodal discourse analysis (SF-MDA) on the mentors' slides. A SF-MDA expands Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) systemic functional linguistics (SFL) focus on meanings from written or spoken language to include additional semiotic resources used in the message (O'halloran, 2008). An SF-MDA examines the whole text and purpose first, and then looks closer at what resources were used to accomplish that purpose. Like SFL, SF-MDA does not posit universal language structures, rather it provides a framework for identifying, describing, and profiling categories and structures of multimodal compositions, in a systematic manner (O'halloran, 2008).

While Miss Johnson valued multimodal composition enough to want her students to have experiences with it, she did not have the expertise to provide instruction to deepen their understanding of the available semiotic resources. Even without a curriculum to assist with multimodal composition, training in how to examine existing multimodal texts through SF-MDA would have been enough for her to better support her students.

Students Use of Images

Even without providing instruction in multimodal composition, the students benefited from being able to include images with their messages. Researchers have found multimodal composition helps marginalized students, whose home literacy practices do not match those

found in schools, develop their literate identity (Sableski, 2007; Vasudevan et al., 2010; Wang, 2022). Examination of the students' images found this to be true as the students were given ways to express themselves in ways they wouldn't have been able to by only relying on written text. This could be most clearly seen in the students who shared their artwork with their mentors. Allowing images during composition allowed for students to develop their identities as artists in a way they couldn't with only the written word. Sableski (2007) posits that literate and social identities are interconnected. She defines literate identity as "the ways in which people form conceptions of themselves as readers and writers based on the discourses of which they are a part" (p. 20). Likewise, Kress explains how "Semiotic modes have different potentials, so that they afford different kinds of possibilities of human expression and engagement with the world, and through this differential engagement with the world they facilitate differential possibilities of development" (Kress, 2010, p. 157). Allowing the students to include images of their artwork helped them build their identity as an artist in ways they would not have been able to with only the written word.

Besides developing their identities, images allowed for the students to form connections to their mentors in ways they couldn't with the written text. Chapter 4 discussed how students used images to engage their mentors directly and indirectly. Jared included an image of his mentor's favorite candy, and Becky included an image of an anime basketball team. These were intentional design choices by the students signifying the relationship formed with their mentors. Without images these significant connections would not have been possible between the participants.

Research Question 3 Conclusion

Allowing opportunities for students to explore with multimodality is not enough to prepare them for the type of messaging they will be exposed to in their lives. Schools must expand their literacy instruction beyond the writing demands of standardized tests and provide professional development for educators in multimodal composition. While Miss Johnson wanted her students to explore multimodal composition, her lack of training in the area due to the lack of focus in education prevented her from doing so. Educators must be given the knowledge and curriculum to provide multimodal experiences for their students.

This study highlighted the opportunities for identity development the inclusion of images provided the students. The students used images to communicate in ways they couldn't with only the written word. This practice benefits all students, but particularly those who are still developing writers. Allowing them to use a variety of semiotic resources increases their voice and keeps them from being disengaged in academic settings.

Final Thoughts

This study took place in a part of the country with incredible educational and economic disparities for African Americans (Watson, 2019). In this setting, schools were only meeting the needs of the dominant culture, failing vast populations of marginalized students and leading to significantly lower graduation rates (Watson, 2019). After years of experience working in these failing urban schools, Miss Johnson knew she needed to develop literacy experiences beyond those provided in the mandated writing curriculum to engage her young writers. She created engaging literacy activities where her students could develop their voice and feel success in schools. While these literacy experiences may not have led to the academic gains needed for success on standardized tests, they had a profound effect on the students' view of schooling.

Throughout the mentorship, the students' writing was not compared to grade level norms or scored by writing rubrics. Student success was measured in their ability to communicate with their mentors about topics that mattered to them. When the mentors responded to their messages, the students felt a success they typically don't experience in schools. Their writing was valued and not critiqued. Based on the results of the study, this is exactly what these students needed to develop confidence and a belief that they can find success in an academic setting. One can only hope these students carry those beliefs with them as they continue to navigate an educational system that measures their success based on their performances on standardized tests.

Limitations

The unique context of the Covid-19 quarantines present limitations regarding transferability and generalizations. While there are larger implications regarding authentic literacy practices, hopefully there is not another educational context similar to the extended period of time when students were receiving remote instruction with very little in-home support.

There were also limitations regarding data collection. I did not have access to the verbal feedback and instructions provided by Miss Johnson, which would have provided deeper insight to her facilitation of the mentorship. I also did not have access to the recording of the Zoom meeting between the participants. This would have presented a great opportunity to compare the topics discussed verbally, synchronously to the topics written about during the correspondence.

There were also limitations interviewing the younger students. It was clear during the interviews the students had a hard time articulating their intentions when creating their messages to their mentors. While they were comfortable with me as an educator in the same building, they were clearly having a hard time discussing their motivations and thoughts. Their written reflections provided much more insight to their thought process throughout mentorship.

Further Research

The Covid-19 quarantines provided a unique context for this study. While virtual learning opportunities continue to expand, this was a time when all students, whether they were equipped for virtual learning or not, were forced to rely on digital methods for instruction. This unique context provided a deeper understanding of student motivation for writing that should be explored more now that students have returned to in-person instruction. ICT continues to be infused into classroom instruction, and further research is needed into the motivations of online communities. Figuring out how to harness that motivation that exists in affinity spaces would be monumental for schools being able to scaffold competencies to participate in these virtual spaces. As discussed, the level of motivation seen in affinity spaces has not been replicated in academic contexts but would be transformative for educators.

This study also highlighted educators' reluctance to instruct in multimodal composition. More research needs to be conducted on the benefits of multimodal communication so educators will be more willing to include these aspects of literacy into their instruction. Additional research can also help to create professional development in this area to help educators incorporate these practices in their classrooms.

REFERENCES

Aitken, A. A., Graham, S., & McNeish, D. (2022). The effects of choice versus preference on writing and the mediating role of perceived competence. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 114*(8), 1844–1865. https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000765

Alvermann, D. E., Hutchins, R. J., & McDevitt, R. (2012). Adolescents' engagement with web 2.0 and social media: Research, theory, and practice. *Research in the Schools*, *19*(1), 33–44.

Andrews, E. E. (1989). *The effects of assigned and unassigned topics on the length and syntactic complexity of grade-three writing with a survey of gender differences in unassigned topic choices and environments of interest* [Doctoral dissertation, Memorial University of Newfoundland].

Assessor, A., Kaplan, H., & Roth, G. (2002). Choice is good, but relevance is excellent: Autonomy-enhancing and suppressing teacher behaviors predicting students' engagement in schoolwork. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, *72*(2), 261–278. https://doi.org/10.1348/000709902158883

Au, W. (2007). High-stakes testing and curricular control: A qualitative metasynthesis. *Educational Researcher*, *36*(5), 258–267. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189x07306523

Bagley, E. A., & Shaffer, D. W. (2014). Stop talking and type: Comparing virtual and face-to-face mentoring in an epistemic game. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, *31*(6), 606–622. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcal.12092

Banegas, D. L., Roberts, G., Colucci, R., & Sarsa, B. A. (2020). Authenticity and motivation: A
    writing for publication experience. *ELT Journal*, *74*(1), 29-39.
    https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccz056

Barksdale, M. A., Watson, C., & Park, E. S. (2007). Pen pal letter exchanges: taking first steps
    toward developing cultural understandings. *The Reading Teacher,*
    61(1). https://doi.org/10.1598/RT.61.1.6

Beard, D. (2009). Communicating with the audience. In M. E. Weiser, B.M. Fehler, & A. M.
    González. *Engaging audience: Writing in an age of new literacies* (pp.89-109). Urbana,
    IL: NCTE.

Behizadeh, N. (2014). Adolescent perspectives on authentic writing instruction. *Journal of
    Language and Literacy Education, 10*(1), 27-44. http://jolle.coe.uga.edu

Bereiter, C., & Scardamalia, M. (1987). *Psychology of written composition*. Taylor and Francis.

Bleck, A. A. (2013). *Examining the impact of student choice of writing topic on writing
    production and accuracy*. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Bonyadi, A. (2014). The effect of topic selection on EFL students' writing performance.
    SAGE Open, 4(3). https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014547176

Bridgeman, B., Morgan, R., & Wang, M. (1997). Choice among essay topics: Impact on
    performance and validity. *Journal of Educational Measurement*, *34*(3), 273–286.
    https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-3984.1997.tb00519.x

Carrington, V., & Robinson, M. (2009). *Digital literacies: Social Learning and classroom
    practices*. SAGE. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446288238

Chapelle, C. (2007). Technology and second language acquisition. *Annual Review of Applied
    Linguistics, 27*, 98-114. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190508070050

170

Chen, C. E. (2005). Experience-based language learning through asynchronous discussion.

International Conference on English Teaching and Learning in the Republic of China.

http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED490012.pdf

Chen, J. C., & Brown, K. L. (2011). The effects of authentic audience on English as a second

language (ESL) writers: A task-based, computer-mediated approach. *Computer Assisted*

Language Learning, *25*(5), 435–454. https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2011.606224

Collins, J., & Blot, R. K. (2009). *Literacy and literacies*. Cambridge University Press.

Cover, R. (2006). Audience inter/active. *New Media & Society*, *8*(1), 139–158.

https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444806059922

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: choosing among*

five approaches. SAGE Publication Inc.

Crotty, M. (2015). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research*

process. SAGE Publication Inc.

Crowhurst, M. (1990). Teaching and learning the writing of persuasive/argumentative

discourse. *Canadian Journal of Education, 15*(4), 348–359. https://doi.org/10.2307/149510

Curwood, J. S. (2013). "The Hunger Games": Literature, literacy, and online affinity spaces.

Language Arts, *90*(6), 417–427.

Curwood, J. S., Magnifico, A. M., Lammers, J. C., & Stornaiuolo, A. (2019). Ethical dilemmas

within online literacy research. *Literacy Research: Theory, Method, and Practice*,

68(1), 293–313. https://doi.org/10.1177/2381336919870264

Dalton, B., & Grisham, D. L. (2013). Love that book. *The Reading Teacher*, *67*(3), 220–225.

https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1206

DeFauw, D., & Saad, K. (2014). Creating science picture books for an authentic audience, Sci*ence Activities, 51*(4), 101-115. https://doi.org/10.1080/00368121.2014.922524

Delpit, L. (2012). *Multiplication is for white people*. New Press.

Dewey, J. (1909). *Moral principles in education*. Houghton Mifflin.

Dinkins, E. G. (2014). Middle school students' perspectives of and responses to strategic revision instruction. *Middle Grades Research Journal, 9*(2). 75-90.

Dowdall, C. (2009). Impressions, improvisations and compositions: Reframing children's text production in social network sites. *Literacy*, *43*(2), 91–99. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-4369.2009.00521.x

Eisner, E. W. (1991). *The enlightened eye: Qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of educational practice*. New York, NY: Macmillan.

Ensher, E. A., Heun, C., & Blanchard, A. (2003). Online mentoring and computer-mediated communication: New directions in research. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 63*(2), 264–288. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0001-8791(03)00044-7

Erickson, J. D., & Wharton-McDonald, R. (2019). Fostering autonomous motivation and early literacy skills. *The Reading Teacher*, *72*(4), 475–483. https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1750

Eshet-Alkalai, Y. (2012). Thinking in the digital era: A revised model for digital literacy. *Issues in Informing Science and Information Technology*, *9*, 267–276. https://doi.org/10.28945/1621

Gambrell, L. B., Hughes, E. M., Calvert, L., Malloy, J. A., & Igo, B. (2011). Authentic reading, writing, and discussion. *The Elementary School Journal*, *112*(2), 234–258. https://doi.org/10.1086/661523

Gebhard, M., Shin, D., & Seger, W. (2011). Blogging and emergent L2 literacy development

      in an urban elementary school: A functional perspective. *CALICO Journal, 28,* 278-307.

      https://doi.org/10.11139/cj.28.2.

Gee, J. P. (2004). *Situated language and learning*. Routledge.

Gee, J. P. (2011). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and Method*. Routledge.

Gee, J. P. (2015). *Literacy and Education*. Routledge.

Gee, J. P., & Hayes, E. R. (2011). *Language and learning in the digital age*. Routledge.

González, N., Moll, L. C., & Amanti, C. (2005). Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing practices in

      households, communities, and classrooms. In Lawrence Erlbaum Associates eBooks (pp.

      47–70). Taylor & Francis.

Greenhow, C., Gibbins, T., & Menzer, M. M. (2015). Re-thinking scientific literacy out-of-

      school: Arguing science issues in a niche Facebook application. *Computers in Human*

      Behavior, *53*, 593–604. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.06.031

Halliday, M., & Matthiessen, C. (2014). *Halliday's introduction to functional*

      grammar. Routledge.

Hart, S., Ellis, J., & Small-McGinley, J. (1998). Mentor-supported literacy development in

      elementary schools. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research, 44*(2), 149.

Hayes, C. W., Bahruth, R., & Kessler, C. (1991). *Literacy con cariño: A story of migrant*

      children's success. Heinemann.

Hovan, G. (2012). Writing for a built-in audience: Writing groups in the middle school

      classroom. *Voices From the Middle*, *20*(2), 49–55.

Hubbard, P. (2008). CALL and the future of language teacher education. *CALICO Journal,*

      25(2). https://www.calico.org/html/article_683.pdf

Jenkins, H. (2009). Confronting the challenges of participatory culture. https://doi.org/https://www.macfound.org/media/article_pdfs/JENKINS_WHITE_PAPER.PDF

Jewitt, C., & Kress, G. (2008). *Multimodal literacy*. Peter Lang.

Jordan, P. (2020, August 22). *What congressional covid funding means for K-12 schools*. Retrieved August 23, 2020, from https://www.future-ed.org/what-congressional-covid-funding-means-for-k-12-schools/

Kalantzis, M., & Cope, B. (2023). *Works and Days*. https://newlearningonline.com/.

Kalantzis, M., Cope, B., & Harvey, A. (2003). Assessing multiliteracies and the new Basics. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, *10*(1), 15–26. https://doi.org/10.1080/09695940301692

Keiser, B. (1991). Creating authentic conditions for writing (in the classroom). *Reading Teacher*, *45*(3), 249–250.

Kessler, K. (2005). Composing for delivery. *English Journal*, *95*(2), 89–95.

Kimbell-Lopez, K., Cummins, C., & Manning, E. (2016). Developing digital literacy in the middle school classroom. *Computers in the Schools*, *33*(4), 211–226. https://doi.org/10.1080/07380569.2016.1249731

Kress, G. (2003). *Literacy in the new media age*. Routledge.

Kress, G. (2010). *Multimodality: a social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. Routledge.

Kress, G., & Van Leeuwen, T. (2001). *Multimodal discourse: The modes and media of contemporary communication.* London: Arnold Publishers.

Lammers, J. (2016). What happens when fanfiction goes to school? the challenges and

    opportunities of teacher-supported networked writing. *Literacy Research Association*.

Lamy, M., & Hampel, R. (2007). *Online Communication in Language Learning and*

    Teaching. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230592681

Lankshear, C., & Knobel, M. (2013). *A new literacies reader: Educational perspectives*. Peter

    Lang.

Larrotta, C., & Serrano, A. F. (2012). Pen pal writing: A holistic and socio-cultural approach to

    adult English literacy. *Journal of Adult Education*, *41*(1), 8-18.

Lee, A. (2000). *Composing critical pedagogies: Teaching writing as revision. refiguring English*

    studies series. National Council of Teachers of English.

Lee, L. (1987). Learning strategy instructions as a key to success in second language

    learning. *Northeast Conference Newsletter*, p11-13.

Lee, Y., Morrow-Howell, N., Jonson-Reid, M., & McCrary, S. (2012). The effect of the

    Experience Corps® program on student reading eutcomes. *Education and Urban*

    Society, 44(1), 97–118. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124510381262

Lemkuhl, M. (2002). Pen-pal letters: The cross-curricular experience. *The Reading Teacher,*

    55.

Levy, S. (2008). The power of audience. *Association for Supervision and Curriculum*

    Development, 75–81.

Lim, F. V. (2018). Developing a systemic functional approach to teach multimodal literacy.

    Functional Linguistics, *5*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s40554-018-0066-8

Loewus, L. (2016, November 9). *Common Core Gives Nod to Digital Skills*. Education Week.

    https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/common-core-gives-nod-to-

    digital-skills/2016/11.

Long, M. H. (1996). The role of the linguistic environment in second language acquisition. In W.

    C. Ritchie, & T. K. Bhatia (Eds.), Handbook of second language acquisition (pp. 413-

    468). New York: Academic Press.

Lui, P. (2002). Developing an e-pal partnership: A school-based international activity.

    Childhood Education, 79, 81-88.

Magnifico, A. M. (2010). Writing for whom? cognition, motivation, and a writer's audience.

    Educational Psychologist, *45*(3), 167–184.

Marsh, E. E., & White, M. (2003). A taxonomy of relationships between images and text.

    Journal of Documentation, *59*(6), 647–672. https://doi.org/10.1108/00220410310506303

McClanahan, L. (2001). *Epals: Examining a cross-cultural writing/literature project*.

    [Unpublished dissertation, Ohio State University]

McGrail, E., & Behizadeh, N. (2017). K-12 multimodal assessment and interactive audiences:

    An exploratory analysis of existing frameworks. *Assessing Writing*, *31*, 24–38.

    https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2016.06.005

McMillon, G. M. (2009). Pen pals without borders: A cultural exchange of teaching and

    learning. *Education and Urban Society*, *42*(1), 119–135.

    https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124509336066

Merchant, G. (2010). 3D virtual worlds as environments for literacy learning. *Educational*

    Research, *52*(2), 135–150. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2010.482739

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: a guide to design and implementation*. Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Neumann, S. B., & Celano, D. (2006). The knowledge gap: Implications of leveling the playing field for low-income and middle-income children. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *41*(2), 176–201. https://doi.org/10.1598/rrq.41.2.2

New London Group. (1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: designing social futures. *Harvard Educational Review*, *66*(1), 60–93.

Newmann, F. M., Marks, H. M., & Gamoran, A. (1996). authentic pedagogy and student performance. *American Journal of Education*, *104*(4), 280–312. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1085433

Nobles, S., & Paganucci, L. (2015). Do digital writing tools deliver? Student perceptions of writing quality using digital tools and online writing environments. *Computers and Composition*, *38*, 16–31. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2015.09.001

O'halloran, K. L. (2008). Systemic functional-multimodal discourse analysis (SF-MDA): constructing ideational meaning using language and visual imagery. *Visual Communication*, *7*(4), 443–475. https://doi.org/10.1177/1470357208096210

Ohlson, M., Ehrlich, S., Blakewood Pascale, A., & Lerman, J. (2017). The virtual mentor: harnessing the power of technology to connect K-12 students with collegiate mentors. *Journal of Interactive Learning Research*, *28*(4), 439–457.

Ohlson, M., & Froman, R. (2012). Virtual mentoring: Developing global leaders for life. *Journal of Educational Multimedia and Hypermedia, 21*(2), 175-185

Pandya, J. Z., & Low, D. E. (2019). Theorizing the addressive audience in children's digital

    video production. *Written Communication*, *37*(1), 41–68.

    https://doi.org/10.1177/0741088319880509

Paretti, M. (2009). When the teacher is the audience. In M. E. Weiser, B.M. Fehler, & A. M.

    González. *Engaging audience: Writing in an age of new literacies* (pp.89-109). Urbana,

    IL: NCTE.

Park, C. N., & Son, J. (2009). Implementing computer-assisted language learning in the EFL

    classroom teacher's perspectives and perceptions. *International Journal of Pedagogies*

    and Learning. https://eprints.usq.edu.au/6887/1/Park_Son_IJPLv5n2_AV.pdf

Patton, A., Hirano, E., & Garrett, A. R. (2017). E-pal dxchanges: a way to connect preservice

    teachers and English language learners. *ORTESOL Journal*, *34*, 48–52.

    https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1152387.pdf

Peregoy, S. F., Boyle, O., & Cadiero-Kaplan, K. (2013). *Reading, writing and learning in ESL:*

    A resource book for teaching K-12 English learners. Boston: Pearson.

Perumal, K., & Ajit, I. (2022). An exploratory study on the difficulties faced by first-

    generation learners in writing skills. *Journal of Higher Education Theory and*

    Practice, *22*(1). https://doi.org/10.33423/jhetp.v22i1.4972

Powell, A., Watson, J., Staley, P., Patrick, S., Horn, M., Fetzer, L., & Verma, S. (2015).

    Blending learning: The evolution of online and face-to-face education from 2008- 2015.

    International association for K-12 online learning.

Purcell-Gates, V., Anderson, J., Gagne, M., Jang, K., Lenters, K. A., & McTavish, M. (2012).

    Measuring situated literacy activity: challenges and promises. *Journal of Literacy*

    Research, *44*(4), 396–425. https://doi.org/10.1177/1086296X12457167

Putnam, D. (2001). Authentic writing using online resources: Selling our words in the

    community. *The English Journal*, *90*(5), 102. https://doi.org/10.2307/821862

Rafaeli, S. (1988). From new media to communication. *Sage Annual Review of*

    Communication Research: Advancing Communication Science 16, 110–134.

Rafaeli, S., & Sudweeks, F. (2006). Networked interactivity. *Journal of Computer-Mediated*

    Communication, *2*(4). https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.1997.tb00201.x

Reich, J., Murnane, R., & Willett, J. B. (2012). The state of wiki usage in U.S. K-12 schools: A

    summary for educators. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2193097

Rothfusz, C. (2020). Creating authentic literacy tasks influences children's engagement and

    motivation. *Innovations and Critical Issues in Teaching and Learning 1*(2), 1-20.

    https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/icitl/vol1/iss2/1

Rowsell, J., Morrell, E., & Alvermann, D. E. (2017). Confronting the digital divide: Debunking

    brave new world discourses. *The Reading Teacher*, *71*(2), 157–165.

    https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1603

Sableski, M. (2007). *The development of literate identities in students identified as struggling*

    readers (Doctoral dissertation, The Ohio State University).

Saldaña, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers.* Sage Publications Ltd.

Selfe, C. L. (2007). *Multimodal composition: Resources for teachers*. Hampton Press.

Shandomo, H. M. (2009). Getting to know you: Cross-cultural pen pals expand children's world

    view. *Childhood Education*, *85*(3), 154–159. https://doi.org/10.1080/00094056.2009.105

Solomon, M. (2010). "Why can't you just say, 'It's cute'?" The role of audience in first

    graders' digital storytelling. *Talking Points*, *24*, 14–22.

Spanke, J., & Paul, K. A. (2015). From the pens of babes. *Gifted Child Today*, *38*(3), 177–186. https://doi.org/10.1177/1076217515583743

Spires, H. A., Hervey, L. G., Morris, G., & Stelpflug, C. (2012). Energizing project-based inquiry: Middle-grade students read, write, and create videos. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *55*(6), 483–493. https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.00058

Stanford, P., & Siders, J. A. (2001). E-pal writing! *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, *34*(2), 21–24. https://doi.org/10.1177/004005990103400203

Street, B. V. (1984). *Literacy in theory and practice*. Cambridge University Press.

Thibaut, P., & Curwood, J. S. (2017). Multiliteracies in practice: Integrating multimodal production across the curriculum. *Theory Into Practice*, *57*(1), 48–55. https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2017.1392202

Tsekova, D. (2020, July 16). *Remote schooling leads to a 'shocking' disparity between rich and poor students*. Retrieved August 23, 2020, from https://finance.yahoo.com/news/remote-school-in-the-fall-will-hurt-lowincome-students-the-most-152333355.html

Vasudevan, L., Schultz, K., & Bateman, J. (2010). Rethinking composing in a digital age: Authoring literate identities through multimodal storytelling. *Written Communication*, *27*(4), 442–468. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741088310378217

Walker-Dalhouse, D., Sanders, V., & Dalhouse, A. D. (2009). A university and middle school partnership: Preservice teachers' attitudes toward ELL students. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, *48*(4), 337-49.

Wang, H. (2022). International English learners' perspectives on multimodal composing and identity representation via multimodal texts. *SAGE Open, 12*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221103526

Watson, A. (2019, November 19). *Report: Milwaukee, Racine Rank as Worst Cities for African Americans to live*. Wisconsin Public Radio. Retrieved March 2, 2023, from https://www.wpr.org/report-milwaukee-racine-rank-worst-cities-african-americans-live

Wiggins, G. (2009). Real-world writing: Making purpose and audience matter. *English Journal*, *98*(5), 29–37.

Willett, R. (2009). Always on: Camera phones, video production and identity. *Video Cultures*, 210–229. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230244696_11

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: design and methods*. Sage.

APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHERN COLORADO

Institutional Review Board

Date:	04/07/2021
Principal Investigator:	Kevin Pribnow
Committee Action:	**IRB EXEMPT DETERMINATION – New Protocol**
Action Date:	04/07/2021
Protocol Number:	2103023165
Protocol Title:	A Systemic Functional-Multimodal Discourse Analysis of the Virtual Partnership Between Fifth Grade Students and Their College Mentors
Expiration Date:	

The University of Northern Colorado Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol and determined your project to be exempt under 45 CFR 46.104(d)(701) (702) for research involving

Category 1 (2018): RESEARCH CONDUCTED IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS. Research, conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, that specifically involves normal educational practices that are not likely to adversely impact students' opportunity to learn required educational content or the assessment of educators who provide instruction. This includes most research on regular and special education instructional strategies, and research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

Category 2 (2018): EDUCATIONAL TESTS, SURVEYS, INTERVIEWS, OR OBSERVATIONS OF PUBLIC BEHAVIOR. Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met: (i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; (ii) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or (iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by 45 CFR 46.111(a)(7).

UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHERN COLORADO

Institutional Review Board

You may begin conducting your research as outlined in your protocol. Your study does not require further review from the IRB, unless changes need to be made to your approved protocol.

As the Principal Investigator (PI), you are still responsible for contacting the UNC IRB office if and when:

- You wish to deviate from the described protocol and would like to formally submit a modification request. Prior IRB approval must be obtained before any changes can be implemented (except to eliminate an immediate hazard to research participants).
- You make changes to the research personnel working on this study (add or drop research staff on this protocol).
- At the end of the study or before you leave The University of Northern Colorado and are no longer a student or employee, to request your protocol be closed. *You cannot continue to reference UNC on any documents (including the informed consent form) or conduct the study under the auspices of UNC if you are no longer a student/employee of this university.
- You have received or have been made aware of any complaints, problems, or adverse events that are related or possibly related to participation in the research.

If you have any questions, please contact the Research Compliance Manager, Nicole Morse, at 970-351-1910 or via e-mail at nicole.morse@unco.edu. Additional information concerning the requirements for the protection of human subjects may be found at the Office of Human Research Protection website - http://hhs.gov/ohrp/ and https://www.unco.edu/research/research-integrity-and-compliance/institutional-review-board/.

Sincerely,

Nicole Morse

Nicole Morse
Research Compliance Manager

University of Northern Colorado: FWA00000784

APPENDIX B

SCHOOL CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHERN COLORADO

Dear School Administrator,

This form grants your consent for me to conduct a research study examining the virtual communication of a fifth-grade classroom and their mentors over the course of the 2020/21 school year. To conduct this study, I would like to examine the digital artifacts from the communication between the students and the women's basketball team. The digital artifacts will be in programs such as Google Slides, Docs, and Flipgrid. A multimodal discourse analysis will be conducted to gain a better understanding of how students use digital tools to communicate to authentic audiences. This research will help schools develop digital literacy practices that can better prepare students for the communication practices of tomorrow.

In addition to the digital artifacts, I would also like to interview Miss Johnson and her students. The interview with Miss Johnson will be conducted on our time. The students will be asked to participate in small-group interviews lasting approximately twenty minutes. These interviews will be scheduled during available periods of time such as after school or lunch. The interview questions will seek understanding of the students' experiences in the partnership. All parents will be contacted for their approval prior to any discussion with students and they will have the option to be present during the interviews. The interviews will be recorded and all identification will be removed during transcription. The recordings of the interviews will then be deleted.

There are no foreseeable risks to any of the participants in this study. Every effort will be made to conceal the identity of the students and no identifiers will be present in the final write up. Participants will be free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns about this research.

Sincerely,

Kevin Pribnow

APPENDIX C

ADULT CONSENT FORM

This form grants your consent to participate in a research study examining the virtual communication of the students and their mentors over the course of the 2020/21 school year. Digital artifacts will be collected from the communication between fifth-grade students and the women's basketball team. A multimodal discourse analysis of the interactions will be conducted to gain a better understanding of how students use digital tools to communicate to authentic audiences. This research will help schools develop digital literacy practices that can better prepare students for the communication practices of tomorrow.

If you grant permission, a forty minute interview will be conducted to better understand the partnership between the players and the students. These interviews will take place virtually with all organizers present. The virtual interviews will be recorded for later transcription. Notes may be taken during the interview. All recordings and notes will be stored on a password protected device. The names of participants will not appear in any of the recordings, transcriptions, or professional reports of this research.

Outside of the time commitment, there are no foreseeable risks resulting from the participation in this study. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns about this research.

Sincerely,

Kevin Pribnow

APPENDIX D

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

Dear Families,

This year, your child had the opportunity to participate in a unique mentorship with a women's basketball team. I would like to study the interactions between your child and their mentor to better understand how students in general use technology to communicate. This form grants your permission for your child to participate in the research study looking at their virtual communication with their mentors.

If you grant permission, your child will be asked to participate in small-group interviews lasting approximately twenty minutes. The interviews will be very relaxed as your child is familiar with me from our interactions at school. I will ask a few questions seeking to understand their experiences in the partnership. These interviews will be scheduled during available periods of time such as after school or lunch. You will be notified of the date and time of the interview and will have the option to be present.

Your child's identity will remain anonymous in this study. Their name will be removed from any transcriptions and in no way will they be able to be identified in the final write up. There are no foreseeable risks from your child participating in this study. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns about this research.

Sincerely,

Kevin Pribnow

APPENDIX E

STUDENT ASSENT FORM

Hi 5th Graders!

I don't know if you know this, but I also go to school! I'm a student at the University of Northern Colorado. I do research on schools and students. That means I study the way people learn and try to help kids of all ages do better in school. I am very interested in your mentorship program with the women's basketball team. I would like to know how you were able to communicate with them virtually. To do this, I need your permission to look over your interactions with the players. Besides that, I would also like to speak with you for twenty minutes to discuss what your thoughts were on the mentorship.

There aren't any risks from you participating in the study. I will make sure that your name does not get written down at all! That means no one will ever know it was you in my study. Your parents have said it's okay for you to talk with me, but you don't have to. It's up to you. Also, if you say "yes" but then change your mind, you can decide not to answer a question or stop any time you want to.

If you want to be in my research, sign your name below and write today's date next to it. Thank you!

_____   _____
Student Signature   Date

_____   _____
Researcher Signature   Date

APPENDIX F

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Dear Families,

For the past three years, I have facilitated a partnership between my classroom students and a women's basketball team. This partnership has involved each student being paired up with a collegiate athlete to serve as their mentor. The partners exchanged handwritten letters as well as spent time getting to know each other when the team visited our classroom. These visits centered around the team being able to provide their expertise in areas like teamwork, college and career readiness, academic behaviors, and developing a relationship as a positive role model with each student. The team has won an award for this community service project and it has been the highlight of each school year for my classroom.

Obviously this year looks very different, but I want to make sure that this program continues. The Parkside Rangers will serve as our virtual mentors. Each student will be paired with a Ranger athlete to exchange electronic letters, share completed school assignments, and co-create a project with. The students will have opportunities to record videos for the team members to view as well as participate in video calls with the entire team and 5th grade class.

As all correspondence is done virtually, I will mediate all exchanges between your student and their mentor. No contact information will be shared to either side of the partnership and no online communication will be unsupervised. No student- or mentor-created files will be accessible to either partner.

Especially in a year where social connections are harder to come by for our students, I am excited to get our partnership underway. From years past, I've seen it motivate students to write more, study harder, and broaden their interests and perspectives. I look forward to seeing how it makes a difference in your child's school year too.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to call, email me at or we can discuss them during our Parent/Teacher conference time.

Talk to you soon,

Here's a tentative schedule of the activities I'd like to carry out this year.

	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.
"Letter" Exchange	x 2	x 2	x 2	x 2	x 2	x 2
Co-Created Projects	Body Systems				Civil Rights - Today	
Audience			Debates		Reading Month	
Parkside Created	Introduction videos. Coach Rose could Zoom w/ team to help complete this. ASAP in Nov.		Mens* & WBB Record Stories (during winterim) see here for idea, I'll supply books!			

* Will follow up with Coach Riegel about conversation we had at Waterfront, but will do with WBB if not.

"Letter" Exchange	Pen Pal type correspondence. I'll have my students begin them. I will group email the team the Slideshow of letters. Team members will email ME their response. (I'll "deliver" to students). Hoping to accomplish a letter a week. Meaning, alternating weeks of receiving a letter and sending one.
Co-Created Projects	Basically, my kids will be working on a project, but there will be a component that they need to either interview or ask for feedback from their mentor in order to complete. On your end, it would be 1-2 sessions facilitated by me.
Audience	This just means the students will know that the project they're creating will be viewed by their mentor. Viewing can be done on your own time!
Parkside Created	Something you guys would create for my kids to view.

Whole group Zooms can be scheduled when we want them to be as well!

195

APPENDIX G

FACILITATING TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Tell me about yourself.
- Why did you become a teacher?
- How do you define success in the classroom?
- What have overall been some of your more positive experiences? Negative?
- What are your biggest challenges as a teacher?

How has virtual learning been this year?

Why did you begin this partnership between the basketball team and your students?
- What outcomes have you witnessed?
- What do you think leads to these outcomes?
- What were your biggest challenges with the program prior to this year?

What has been different this year now that the mentorship is virtual?
- What outcomes have you witnessed?
- What do you think leads to these outcomes?
- What were your biggest challenges relying solely on virtual communication?
- What changes would you make for future implementation?

How did the students' multimodal presentations compare to their classroom writing?
- Did you notice any differences in students' planning process when creating multimodal presentations and classroom writing?
- What considerations did students' make when designing their presentations?

Did you notice anything different regarding your students' writing for the mentorship compared to for other academic purposes?
- What aspects of the mentorship led to positive literacy outcomes?
- What methods for connecting students to the mentors were the most effective? Why?
- Did the mentors serving as the audience for the presentation influence design decisions by the students?

What resources would you need to increase the effectiveness of the partnership? What potential do partnerships, such as the one you developed, have for student learning?

Is there anything else you'd like to share?

APPENDIX H

STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHERN COLORADO

What was your favorite part about having a mentor?

What did you learn from your mentor this year?

What kind of relationship did you have with your mentor?

What did you like about creating presentations on the computer?

What was challenging about it?

Did you like sharing your presentations with your mentors? Why?

What was different about writing to your mentor and your teacher?

Anything else you wish to share?

APPENDIX I

MENTOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

What was your favorite part about being a mentor?

What did you learn about your mentees?

What kind of impact do you think you had on the students?

What considerations did you make when responding to students?

- What opportunities did you have to mentor students?

- What considerations did you make when responding to the students' presentations?

How well were you able to develop relationships with your mentees?

Those of your who participated in years past, what was different about interacting virtually?

What was challenging about it?

What suggestions would have for structuring a partnership like this in the future?

APPENDIX J

MEGAN AND MICHELLE'S CORRESPONDENCE

My name is Michell and I'm a junior and a guard for the Women's Basketball team. This is actually my first year here in Wisconsin. I play basketball and went to school in Utah for two years before I came here. Okay so I'm going to talk a little bit by myself. To start with I'm actually not from the United States. I'm from another country. I'm from Sweden. I've been pretty much my whole life here and I just love the town. It's so pretty with all the water even the cold Winters are really pretty and we also have something called the Northern Lights. So yeah I lived in this town together with my mom, my dad, and my twin brother. The main reasons why I came to United States, I want to play basketball, because a lot of traveling and three for school. So my favorite subjects are these two we have mathematics and we have biology. Later in life I really want to become a doctor in particular a cardiologist also known as a heart doctor. I have some Hobbies other than basketball and the main one is doing outdoor things. I like riding horses, climbing, skiing all kind of stuff. I just love being out in nature and have a good time with my friends and my family and yeah just enjoying nature. So yeah that's a little bit about me and don't hesitate if there's anything else you want to know about. Im more than willing to tell me about that. Other than that I know it's a little bit different right now since we can meet in person and I know it can be tough for you since you can't go play with your friends everyday too. But I really hope that I can help you anyway and also just want to tell you that you got a friend in me. always so if there is anything I can help you with again just let me know. I'm more than willing to do it I really excited to know more about you so yeah hope you're having a good day Bye

---

Dear Michelle,

My name is Megan.i am puerto rican and black. I like to play basketball and football. I mostly play football. I play for a team me and my friends made we have tournament every month. My position is pg sometimes I play center because im tall or one of my teammates didn't make it. I have 8 siblings 2 step brothers 4 blood brothers and 2 sisters. When i grow up i want to go to law school and be a lawyer or a mayor. I also have long hair, i like when it's done and not all over the place. What are the activities you do in sweden? Hope to hear from you soon! Sincerely shaq o'neal aka Megan

---

Mail to Megan

Hey, Shaq O'neal! Good to hear from you. I could tell that you are into sports, and that's great! I love all kinds of sports, and that's super cool that you can have tournaments every month with your friends!

It's really cool that you want to go to law school when you grow up! Is there anything else you want to do when you grow up? I know that I want to get a dog and a nice apartment.

In Sweden, I like go skiing in the mountains and go for hikes. I like to spend time near the ocean too and go swimming. Other than that, I like playing board games and video games with my friends. Do you have any games you like?

I like your nickname, by the way! Do you mind if I call you Shaq from now on?

Hope to hear from you soon!

From Michelle

Dear Michelle,

Thanks for your letter, Michelle! Yes you could call me anything. I like games but the only games i play are gta and among us. I also want to remodel and sale houses. This year me and my brother are only getting gifts but not a tree. Are you getting a tree for christmas? What are you doing for new years? On new years i'll be celebrating my birthday, it's on new years. I get birthday hits every year, last year they jumped me when the countdown hit zero. Whens your birthday?

Hi Megan!

What's up, Shaq! Hope the break has been good and that you are doing well!

I love "Among Us"! We actually play it a lot with the team and it's so much fun.

I spent Christmas with one of my teammates and her family since I couldn't go home and we had a huge Christmas tree! I got some nice clothes for Christmas, what about you? Did you get anything fun?

For New Years we celebrated my teammate's birthday (yes, she has her birthday on New Year's Eve, just like you, so happy belated birthday to you!). I made her a cake and we were just enjoying ourselves with games and music! What did you do? Also what kind of music do you listen to(if you listen to music)?

Take care and we'll talk soon!

Michelle

Dear Michelle

For my birthday i got money and shoes. For christmas i helped my brother build mini skate boards, sometimes me and my brother build his legos into weird supposed to be things. The music i listen to is calm (sometimes), who are your favorite people to listen to? Mine are j cole, zsa, bruno, jhene aiko, h.e.r, giveon, brent faiyaz, partynextdoor, aj mitchell, dej loaf. On my birthday my sister tried to put cake on my nose but she missed.

Hi Megan!

Shoes and money are great gifts! I really love shoes and don't mind to have several pairs. My personal favorites are vans shoes, but I do like all kinds of shoes. Apart from that, I'm happy that you and your brother are having fun! My brother and I used to build stuff with Lego when we were younger. We even made an entire city made of Lego and made our own Lego movies!

PARTYNEXTDOOR is my vibe, I love his music! I do find it hard to pick a favorite though because I listen to all kinds of music, it depends on my mood. Before games I like to listen to JAY-Z and Joyner Lucas, but if I just want to relax I enjoy listening to Coldplay. Did I tell you that my brother is a music producer and rapper? I'm not joking, his artist name is V9 and he has made songs together with other singers but he has also produced music to movies and video games!

I watched the movie Divergent the other day, and I liked it.
Do you have a favorite movie?

Hope to hear from you soon,

Michelle

Hi Megan!

What's up Shaq!!

How have you been since last time? I am just doing my thing: studying, working out, hanging out with friends and so on. I had spring break 2 weeks ago and I went to Utah to do some cool outdoor stuff like skiing and hiking but also to just hang out with my friends. I had a great time.

We have started with post-season workouts, and they're good! I am doing a lot of ball-handling and working a lot on details in my game, which is good! Have you played any basketball lately? It's fun to just hang out with your friends and shoot some hoops and have a great time! Especially now when the weather is so nice!

I know it's a little bit too early, but do you have any plans for the summer? I am going to work at the hospital in my hometown but other than that I really hope that I can go to some lakes or the ocean and go boating, kayaking and swimming. Chilling on the beach doesn't sound too bad for me either!

I hope to hear from you soon and that you are doing well!

Best,

Michelle

P.S. Here is a video of some drills if you are interested in working on your ball-handling.

I did these drills last summer and they are challenging, but fun! Try it out if you want!

Dear Michelle ,

Lately i have been good. How was the weather in utah? I played basketball at recess today. I blocked my classmate and Miss Johnson said it was cool.

My plans for the summer are going fishing, playing with my basketball team, i might read, i'm trying to level up on fortnite.

Thanks for the video i will try that.

Is college hard? What is it like to live in a dorm or with other people? How hard is it to be a college athlete and student?

Hi Megan!

Weather in Utah was great! One day it was raining a lot, but other than that it was sunny and nice. And I'm so happy to hear that you were playing basketball and that you had a block. NICE!!! 😊

Seems like you have fun stuff coming up this summer. I've never played fortnite but I have heard good stuff about it, and yeah get to the next level.

We talked a little bit about college at the zoom call, but I am more than happy to tell you my experience again. I feel that college is what you make it. It can be hard if you make it hard, but if you're disciplined and stay on top of school, health, and your social life and manage to balance it all, you will have a great time! I really enjoy living with other people, that's the people you make great friends with. Dorms are cool, but a little bit too small for me. I rather live in an apartment on campus where you have your own kitchen, bathroom, and living room. Being a student-athlete can be hard sometimes- you have to balance school and sports and sometimes you barely have time for anything else but that. But again, stay disciplined and you'll be fine. College has really given me so much and so many new friends and great memories. Yes, it is a lot of work, but it's so worth it!

It was really nice to talk to you at the zoom call! I hope you will be able to come and watch us play next season. Maybe we can play some 1-1, promise me to not block me too 😜

Peace out!

Michelle

Dear, Megan

May 4

I did level up on fortnite i was on 75 when we last talked on im on 112. My sister is in college she stays at home or does zoom, she could've had a dorm but she wanted to be with family. I appreciate you writing letters to me and being my mentor. I will always remember that you want a dog and a apartment. I loved when we talked about college because i didn't know alot about college i thought it was just a building with a lot of rooms. I hope you win allllllllll your game. I think you will block me everytime i shoot. Your probably taller than me plus my shooting release is bad i'll work on it tho. If you decide to play fortnite someday add me at (it was a random name.)

Or like this

I think your dog would look like this :)

204

APPENDIX K

JULIE AND REGINA'S CORRESPONDENCE

Hi my name is Regina. I'm a junior on the women's basketball team. I'm from Wisconsin, about 45 minutes away from here. My major is an elementary major. I'm going to be just like your teacher after I graduate.

So I am a big guard according to our coach for our basketball team. Some of my interests outside of basketball is hanging out with friends and family. I love being by the lake. I love hiking. I love being outside. A fun fact is over quarantine I actually got a black lab puppy. Her name is Baily. She is about 8 months now and I also have another dog. Her name is Sammy. She is about 5 years old right now.

One of best parts about being in college is the community around us. We do a lot of things with the community. We do bingo. I also just like being a part of this school because everyone is so nice and we all get along. Last thing I just want to say is I cant wait to meet all you guys and I can't wait for your responses.

Dear Regina

Hi i am Julie and i love basketball and i have a older sister, do you have any sibling and i have two corgis and ones is seven and ones is two and in my free time i like to be with my corgis and what is your favorite animal ? mine favorite animal is dogs and cats and mouses. From my house to my school i can walk to my school it's basically 10 minutes from my house, and my favorite stuffed animal is a bunny and do you have any stuffed animals from your childhood? I used to play a instrument ,do you play a instrument?

Talk to your soon, from Julie

Hi Julie!

I have 2 other siblings, I have a younger brother and also a younger sister! What are your two corgis names? My favorite animal I have to say is either an elephant or a giraffe. What makes mice one of your favorite animals? That's really cool that you can walk to and from school, I actually would walk home from school too when I was your age! And yes I do have stuffed animals from my childhood still, and I also have 4 squishmellows, they are my favorite! That's really cool that you played an instrument, what instrument did you use to play? I have never played an instrument before but if i could learn to play I think it would be cool to learn how to play a guitar! How was your Thanksgiving and what is your favorite thing to eat during Thanksgiving? I hope you had a good holiday celebrating with your family and can't wait to hear back from you!

Regina

HAPPY thanksgiving

Dear Regina

Hi ,my corgis names are Kelp and Zoey, what's your dogs names? I think a mice are cool because they have 208 bones and they there really tiny and they have 208 bones, and why do you like a giraffe and a elephant? my sister really love squishmellows, And what's your planes for christmas. My insr mean is a violin. My favorite thing to have on thanksgiving is turkey and mashed potatoes, on my thanksgiving i went to my cousins house and me and one of my cousins played with there dog named rocky and other thing and i forgot and what did you did for your thanksgiving .

Talk to you soon,Julie

HI MADDY!!!

HOPE YOU HAD A GREAT NEW YEAR! MY DOGS NAMES ARE SAMMY AND BAILEY, SAMMY IS A RED FOX LAB AND BAILEY IS A BLACK LAB! THAT'S SO COOL HOW YOU KNOW SO MUCH ABOUT MICE! AND I'M NOT REALLY SURE WHY GIRAFFES AND ELEPHANTS I JUST LOVE SEEING THEM AT THE ZOO! HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN PLAYING THE VIOLIN? I SPENT THANKSGIVING WITH MY FAMILY AS WELL, IT WAS A LOT OF FUN AND ATE TOO MUCH FOOD. HOW WAS YOUR CHRISTMAS? WHAT WAS YOUR FAVORITE GIFT? FOR CHRISTMAS I SPENT TIME WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS AND ATE LOTS OF CANDY :) DID YOU DO ANYTHING SPECIAL FOR NEW YEARS?

I HOPE TO HEAR FROM YOU SOON, HAPPY NEW YEAR!!

REGINA

Dear Regina,

Hey Regina.

I had a wonderful new year i went to my cosins cus ever year my cousins have a new years party and we would go in the pool and when its night we do fireworks and after we make smores and wean we go to sleep me and my other cousin we stay up until 3 am cus we like to do creepy stuff in there basement, from christmas i got some corgi plushie and corgi scrunches and two shallow and there names are one BIG one was sharei and i called it a new named its called harry styles and that cat is names palita and i have been playing the violin for about a year, i got harry from christmas last year an i got Palita and how is basketball going. Whats your fav pars of shoes? Mine is nikie. Whats your fav book? Mine is Dork Diaries.

Talk to you soon maddy. From Julie

Harry styles

Palita

HI JULIE!!!

It sounds like you had a super fun new year! Do you guys go in the pool when it hits midnight to celebrate? And you make s'mores?! That sounds amazing! Staying up super late with your cousins is something fun to do. I remember doing fun things with my cousins all the time when I was little! I love squishmellows, I have 4! I have a big hippo and octopus, and I have 2 small ones, a giraffe and a squid. They are so compfy! Basketball is going good, thanks for asking! It has been a different year because of covid but we are all very thankful that we get to have a season this year! That's a long time that you have been playing the violin! Do you know how to play any songs? I also love nike, I love all of their tennis shoes along with adidas! I used to love the dork diaries when I was your age too! And I honestly don't have a favorite book, but if I have to say I have to go with a classic from when I was younger, green eggs and ham. My mom used to read that to me all the time! I also really like your presentation you put with your response, it was really put together well. It was fun to listen too! It was very fun getting to hear from you again and I hope all is well, talk to you soon!

Regina

Dear, Regina

Hey Regina.

When it hits midnight we always do that. With my cousin we always stay up until like adout 3:00 and we wold tell scary stories, and it is fun. I've been playing the violin for like about a year now the song i've working on is called i jused this one called head, shoulders, nese and toes and some others songs and whats your favroit song? My favroit song is, backyard boy. Whats your favrorit thing to do when your bord? My favroit thing to do when im bord is to go on tiktok and watch my favroit tiktoker.

HI JULIE!!!

That's so cool that you have been playing violin that long, that's very impressive! I have never heard backyard boy before, but I looked it up and it was a good song! I don't really have a favorite song I like all country music! I like to watch tv when im bored and I also watch tik tok! Do you know any dances? Who's your favorite tik toker? Did you guys get to have a spring break? Me and my teammate went to florida for 5 days. It was really fun and relaxing! What did you do for easter? Do you and your family do an easter egg hunt? It was fun getting to talk to you again, hope to talk to you again soon!!
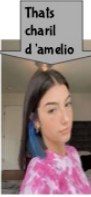
Regina

Dear: Regina

Thats is lilhuddy

Hey, my favrite tik toker is Lilhuddy and charil d'amelio. The dances that i know from tik tok is foot fungus, up, rake it up, hey boy. Some other tik tok dances. We did have spring break.

For my spring break i went to my cousins for early ester
And we did a hunt for candy and in one of there room
A full on ester room like candy every where and other

Thats charil d'amelio

Stuff and on my ester i got another squshmello named
Candy And i did have a Easter egg hunt i did it with my sister
Byeee Julie!!

HI JULIE!!!

I have not seen lilhuddie on tik but I have seen charlie dance! She's really good! That's really cool that you know all those dances! I am not a very good dancer haha :) I remember when we did our zoom meeting you telling me about your spring break and what you did for easter! It sounded super fun! My plans for summer is to work and spend time with family and friends! That's so cool that you'll have a graduation party for your sister, is she graduating high school? I love hayward, if you go downtown they have a fun little candy shop! You should check it out! You will have so much fun there! I am so sad that this will be our last letter... I really enjoyed getting to know you, you are an amazing little girl! If you ever want to talk you can email me any time!

Regina

Hi Regina

Im really sad the is our last letter to each other and i really had fun doing it and my sister is graduating high school she going to collge. That zoom was amazing and i want to do more and this was a really fun time doing this cus it was fun and it was interesting to talk to a college stunted and its really fun this was like the funest thing i did this year so far.

Have a good rest of college and have a good summer!

Julie!:)

207

APPENDIX L

BRIAN AND CARRIE'S CORRESPONDENCE

Hi Guys - I'm Carrie. I'm from Minnesota about 6 hours from here. I'm an incoming freshman on the women's basketball team and my major is currently undecided. I'm play post. That's my position. Some interests and hobbies I have are sports, hanging out with friends, and cleaning. The best part about being in college is meeting such great people. I can't wait to meet you guys.


Dear Carrie

Do you have a dog? And my name is Brian I have four dogs in total and I love to go fishing and gaming. What is your favorite place to go have fun like an amusement park,? I like to go to six flags and my favorite sport is football my favorite thing to do at school is recces.

I am 10 years old and my favorite colors yellow whats your favorite color?

I play basketball at recces with all my friends. I am very into the artistic creativity things I love to draw and create ill show you I made something at the bottom of the letter or what ever you would call It do you like to draw and paint im not that good at painting.

Talk to you next time

Brian

Hello Brian! WOW you have a lot of dogs, lucky you. What are their names and what kind of dogs do you have? I do not have a dog, I wish. My brother does have two dogs named Tank and Oakley and I love them, they are black labs. My favorite color is a mint blue. I have not been to six flags but we do have an amusement park in Minnesota where I live called Valley Fair and my favorite ride is the Renegade. DO you have a favorite ride? I love football too, it is so much fun! Do you play football and basketball outside of school like in a league? I am not very artistic or good at drawing but you will for sure have to show me more, your work at the bottom of the page is super cool! Do you have a favorite food? How is school going? If you could be anything when you grow up, what would it be? If you could have a superpower, what would it be? Do you enjoy winter? Do you play any video games? What is top on your list for Christmas? I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely, Carrie

Dear Carrie

This is Brian and all my dogs names are Gunnar,Moose,Gizmo And Hunter and gunnar live at my grandparents moose lives at my dads and gizmo lives at my moms so there all at separate places but i see all of them every week. And i do play video games i have a xbox one s and a ds i like to play fortnite call of duty do you play any games? I also like to draw. My favorite roller coaster ride is Viper from six flags,Joker,Batman and last but not least american eagle there all so fun.

What i want for christmas is xbox series x and games. That's all.

My dogs are black labs and to pitbulls and no not in a league for football and basketball just for fun and yes i enjoy winter it's really fun and when i grow up i want to be a pro cooking chef and a paleontologist its digging dino bones and stuff like that and for a superpower it would be being able to move things with my mind and yea hope to talk to you again.

Brian

Hey Brian!

It was so wonderful to see you in your video and I hope you had a wonderful Christmas and got everything you wanted! What did you end up getting for Christmas? You should send me some pictures of your dogs if you have any, I would love to see them! You asked if I play Xbox. I actually used to play call of duty of my brothers Xbox when I was younger and I loved it. I have played fortnite a few times but not much, I don't understand it. Speaking of six flags, we are on our way to our first road trip and we drove past six flags! I hope to go there someday! I went home to Minnesota for Christmas and was with my parents and brother most of the time and he brought over his dogs too so it was awesome seeing them. Did you spend time with any family over break? Being a chef would be awesome, I wish I could cook. Do you do any cooking at home? When you become a chef you will have to come cook for me lol. How's school going? Do you enjoy playing in the snow? It's was so nice talking again.

Talk to you soon pal!

Carrie

Dear Carrie I dont have pictures of my dogs but i'll answer the rest of the questions lol. For christmas i got a new phone and I got a leopard gecko but he passed away a few days ago but i got another one so her name is Mango and she's SUPER fast and she jumps alot but atleast Mango is already used to being in my hand the first day she was fine with it and that's surprising. Over christmas tho i went to wilderness On the Lake with my mom and my siblings it was fun we went to the waterpark and stuff. And like to play in the snow but it's not something i always do, it gets boring every once and a while so yea.

You'll be a really good cook someday but it takes practice so the more you try the better you will get at it schools going real good it's fun and we got a date for when we go back to real school on March 1st I can't wait. It was nice talking to you have a good january.

How was your game? And what did you do over break? How was your Christmas what's your favorite show to watch? Did you win the basketball game?and last but not least question What did you get for christmas?

And the flip grid I have is about persuasive presentation and the reason were doing it is because we have to persuade people about whatever we picked and I picked dogs. And I hope you enjoy the video have a nice Day.

Brian

Hello Brian!

Oh my goodness, you're so lucky to get a new phone, what kind of phone did you get? I am sorry about your gecko. Mango sounds super cool. Why did you choose the name Mango? What is wilderness? I will have to get in the kitchen more often to practice cooking! Do you have a favorite dish you like to make? That is so awesome that you get to go back to real school, I bet you're looking forward to it! Over break I was with family most of the time, friends and my boyfriend. My favorite show is All American. For Christmas I actually got a new phones so we are twinning lol. I enjoyed your video and I agree with you when you say who would rather have a cat then a dog because dogs are awesome!!! I hope you have a good week, talk to you soon!

Carrie

Dear Carrie

For christmas I got an iPhone SE and i like it and the reason i named my new leopard gecko mango is because of her color she's like orange and yellowish and i actually learned how to send pictures from my phone to my computer so i can show you my dogs and leopard gecko. The wilderness is a waterpark resort in Wisconsin dells it's really fun we went to the wilderness on the lake for our Hotel.my favorite dish is pepper steak that my grandma makes its delicious but there's more than just a steak and speaking of food i got a retainer for my mouth because im getting braces soon i need it for two whole months and i cant even eat with it on so i'm having trouble with that.
And thanks about the video. Now im in real school and i like it alot better but i wish it was shorter going back to 4 o clock changed a lot of my schedule.

Here's one of my dogs his name is Gunnar but he's bigger now lol
That's a puppy picture i'll show
You the rest next time

Brian

Hey Brian!

How are you???? It has been so long! I hope everything is well. I heard you get to go to in person class now, that is awesome! Your dog is absolutely adorable. I am not sure if I told you or not but my brother has two black labs and they are so cool! I had braces in high school and I was not a fan but in the end your teeth will look great. Just make sure you keep up with your bands because I decided not to wear them and that was not a good choice. Have you had anything interesting happen since the last time we talked? I hope school is going good and just think, summer is right around the corner!

Talk to you soon!

Carrie

Dear Carrie i just finished spring break did you have a spring break? I liked it i wish spring break was longer lol and if you did have spring break how was it. And i didnt know that your brother has 3 black labs but now i know and i can't wait until we go in the zoom together.

Is college fun? And do you get a break from doing work sometimes and how are your brothers dogs doing.

And the reason i have a pikachu picture over it is cause i like pokemon do you like it. I've just always been a nintendo fan so i like pokemon alot not as much as i did last year but and yea talk to you next time bye and i have a assignment called animal adaptations that i did i would like if you read it hope you like it bye.

Brian

Hey Brian!

Yes I did have spring break, my teammates and I went to Florida, it was a lot fun and i wish it was longer too! I hope you enjoyed the zoom session, I sure did! It was awesome getting to know you! We did not win our last basketball game unfortunately :(College is fun but a lot of work so you have to really focus and do your work well. My brothers dogs are doing well, I get to see them soon so I am very excited! I really liked your animal adaptations assignment. Well done! I hope the end of the school year goes well for you!

Talk to you soon!

Brian

Carrie

Hey Carrie it really sucks that this is the last letter i'm writing to you but i hope that you have a good basketball season and have a great summer.

It was really nice that we got to talk about dogs and are pets and basketball because its my favorite sport how has college been going and i started watching a show called Naruto a while ago if you know it tell me but yea i think its really good you don't have to watch it but i also put a drawing that i drew on the bottom right corner so yea and how long do you get a break from college? And yea it was really nice talking to you hope you have a great year. And thank you for everything we talked about Bye from Brian.

APPENDIX M

MADDUX AND CONNIE'S CORRESPONDENCE

Hi Guys - My name is Connie. I'm a senior this year. The position that I play is like a 1 2. Like a point guard/shooting guard. Also, I'm originally from California. Go Lakers, Dodgers - champions this year. I actually live in Arizona so that is pretty hot. Also my hobbies, I really like to collect shoes. Honestly I don't even know how much I have, but it is a very expensive hobby. Hopefully one day I can meet you guys.

Dear Connie

Hi my name is Maddux and my hobbies are playing basketball and football and i saw your flip grid and i'm a fan of the lakers to lebron james is my favorite player who is yours? Also me and you play the same position in basketball im a point guard too. And what was some of your favorite sports when u were a kid? and was getting into college hard? one more thing when your on the court do you feel like u have a lot of pressure on u i do sometime. And the stuff i like about school is is gym and my band what are some of your favorite subjects in school?

Hello Maddux!

Hey Maddux, I'm happy that your favorite team is the Lakers because they are best! I actually played flag football when I was younger, it was so fun! **What is your favorite football team?** My favorite basketball player is Kobe Bryant! My favorite sports when I was a kid is actually still the same basketball and football. That is so cool that you're a point guard and **Who is your favorite point guard in the NBA?** Getting into college is not hard if you get study and get good grades! If you want to play sports in college you need to work hard and dedicate your time to whatever sport you play! Hard work pays off!! Sports isn't just physical it's mental! You have to stay strong whenever things to do not go your way! Don't give up you got it! I sometimes feel like there is pressure on me if people expect a lot for me sometimes but I take that as a compliment! **What instrument do you play?** I tried to play the flute before! My favorite subject in school is Psychology! **What is yours?** I'm excited to hear back from you stay safe!

Sincerely, Connie

Dear Connie
My favorite football team is the packers this one game when the packers went against the bears my mom said that the bears would win but they didn't. And my favorite point guard is curry. And the instrument i want to play is a jatare and the instrument i have is brums. Talk to u soon and what made u collect shoes and do u like the packers, and do u like curry.

Maddux

Dear Maddux,

Nice your favorite team is the Packers I love Aaron Rodgers he is one of my favorite quarterbacks in the league! Also, Curry is good I really like his shoes to play in do you have any? Wow I love the both the guitar and drums how long have you been playing the drums? Can you sing too? The shoes I collect is Nike and Jordan's I honestly like everything if I like shoe! How many shoes Do you have? No I am not a Packers fan I like the Cowboys lol I do like Curry he is good but I really like Damian Lillard and Kyrie! Do you like them?

Sincerely, Connie

Dear Connie,

Yes i do like them alot and my favorite tipe of shoes is jordans 11 ands iv played dumes like for 3 months yes i can sing a little and i have like 30 pairs of shoes what is your favorite cooler, and what is your favorite movie and tv show.

Yes i do like Damian Lillard and Kyrie. And i like kyrie because he is fast and i like lillard because he can dunk and he can make three and do u like jordan and do u like lebron james son and how many points have u made this season if u went to the nba what team would u want to join when i go to the nba i am going to join the golden state warrior or the lakers.

212

Maddux

Hello Maddux,

Hope you are doing good! Yes I love Jordan do you think he is the greatest player of all time? I think Kobe Bryant is the greatest of all time. Lebrons son Bronny is ok I don't think he is bad he is just young. How do you feel about Bronny? Semaj this season I averaged 9.7 points a game will do better next year! If i went to the NBA I would be on the Lakers because I love the Lakers and I love California. How you heard about the WNBA? I hope everything is going good for you stay safe!

Sincerely,

Connie

hey i don't reality know who i think is the best player and i think bronny is good do u like the blazers and if i went to the nba i would join the lakers or the blazers and when i was in fourth grade somebody it was a coach and he liked how i played so i played for that team i think kobe is the best three point shooter who do u think is the best three pointer i do like this dunk thought ok bye did u like this dunk. And one more thing how to make more of my threes.

Maddux

Hi Maddux,

I hope you're doing good! I am a Lakers fan but I like Damian Lillard on the Blazers. If you went to the NBA I think the Lakers would be a great team for you that is my favorite team. I love Kobe Bryant he is my favorite player of all time! Kobe is a good shooter and Lebron's dunk is cool not a big fan of him. I made 25 3s this season . I hope school is good!

Sincerely,

Connie

Connie

O yes and have u played 2k i have and i made him play shooting garod and he is sooooo good at threes and he can dunk and yes kobe is super good but who do u think would win jordan or kobe. And thanks for talking with me. And i liked what we talked about and thanks for helping me with my jump shot. And good luck.

Maddux

APPENDIX N

JARED AND CONNIE'S CORRESPONDENCE

Hi Guys - My name is Connie. I'm a senior this year. The position that I play is like a 1 2. Like a point guard/shooting guard. Also, I'm originally from California. Go Lakers, Dodgers - champions this year. I actually live in Arizona so that is pretty hot. Also my hobbies, I really like to collect shoes. Honestly I don't even know how much I have, but it is a very expensive hobby. Hopefully one day I can meet you guys.

Dear Connie,

I watched your video. My name is Jared and i play basketball to just like you and i collect shoes to my favorite is jordans whats you favorite candy mine is laffy taffys how long have you played basketball i played since i was like 5 now im 10   whin is you birthday mine is aug 31 2010

Hello Jared!

Hey Jared, that is so cool that you play basketball and collect Jordans! What is your favorite pair of Jordans? I like Jordan 11s and 1s! My favorite candy is Reese's Peanut Butter Cups. I have been playing basketball since I was 5 too! Who is your favorite basketball player? My birthday is December 1st actually coming up soon!! Do you have any pets? I have 1 dog named Max! I'm so excited to hear back from you stay safe!

Sincerely

,

Connie

hi i like the jordans 12 i have a pair its so fun to talk to someone that i have in comon Thanks for responding you the best and i love that you played since 5 my dream is to be a nba player i want to play for goldanstates i dont have any pets my favorate basketball player is curry liceskin land im liceskin. I know you new to the team how is it going?

Jared

Dear Jared,

Hey! Jordan 12s are cool I like Jordan 11s and Jordan 1s. It makes me happy that you're happy to talk to me because I am too! How many shoes do you have in your collection? I see you're dream is to be in the NBA that is amazing I hope you work hard and push yourself! You will go through ups and downs but the game is mental and you can do it! I believe in you! Don't let anything get in your way!! I see you want to play for Golden State what number do you want? I am a big Lakers fan but Curry is good too. Jesse light skin land you make me laugh lol I am new to the team and it's cool we are 0-2 but we will get better!! It's only the beginning!

Sincerely, Connie

Dear Connie,

Hello this is Jared how are you doing and i like jordan 1s there cool and im going to school on march1 how is basketball going. how are you doing im just in school trying to get in the nba working as hard as i can talk to me when you can talk to you later

Jared

Hello Jared,

I hope you are doing good! I heard you were in person for classes how do you like it? Right now our team is doing post season workouts and it is pretty fun I am learning a lot! How do you think the Warriors are doing this NBA season? How do you think Curry is doing? I hope everything is going good for you keep working hard in school and basketball so can make your dreams come true! Stay safe.

Sincerely,

Connie

Dear Connie,

Hi ! i haven't talked to you in a long time how are you doing im doing fine i think i got better at basketball have you? curry sill in the league lebron is mad lebron is going to be on space jam you should watch it in perso school is great i like my teacher can you give me some advice from you team and you and i think curry is doing good living the the rich life talk to you later

Jared

Hi Jared,

Yes it has been a while but I am glad you're doing good because I am! Thats awesome that you got better at basketball I have too! This postseason I have working a lot of my game. Keep grinding and putting in the work the results will be great! Oh yes I saw that Lebron was on Space Jam and yes I will be watching. I am happy you like your teacher are you doing good in school? Jesse keep doing good in school and respect your teacher and coaches! If you keep working hard you can be rich like Curry!

Sincerely,

Connie

216

APPENDIX O

ADDISON AND REGINA'S CORRESPONDENCE

Hi my name is Regina. I'm a junior on the women's basketball team. I'm from Wisconsin, about 45 minutes away from here. My major is an elementary major. I'm going to be just like your teacher after I graduate.

So I am a big guard according to our coach for our basketball team. Some of my interests outside of basketball is hanging out with friends and family. I love being by the lake. I love hiking. I love being outside. A fun fact is over quarantine I actually got a black lab puppy. Her name is Baily. She is about 8 months now and I also have another dog. Her name is Sammy. She is about 5 years old right now.

One of best parts about being in college is the community around us. We do a lot of things with the community. We do bingo. I also just like being a part of this school because everyone is so nice and we all get along. Last thing I just want to say is I cant wait to meet all you guys and I can't wait for your responses.

Dear Regina,
        Whats your favrite food/drink/thing to do/time of day
        And do you like starbucks better or taco bell
And do you have a pet i have two toads
Whats your favrite holliday
And i have a cat at my dads
And my next door aunt has a dog
Do you play roblox
I play roblox and on adopt me i have a fly rat five bats four snow cats a fennce fox a normal cat a chocolate lab and idk what else i have in that game for pets

Hi Addison!

Hope everything is going well, my favorite food would have to be steak and my favorite drink is Dr. Pepper. What is your favorite food and drink? My favorite thing to do is to play outside with my two dogs and my favorite time of day is probably afternoon. I love watching the sunsets! I would prefer starbucks over taco bell, what is your go to order if you would go to starbucks or taco bell? You have toads!? That is so cool, what are their names? I have a pond in my backyard and we have all types of frogs. I do have two dogs, one is 5 and her name is Sam, and the other one is named Bailey and she will be turning 1 in February. What is your aunt's dog name? My favorite holiday would have to be Christmas, what about you? I do not have a roblox, what do you do on that game? I hope you have a good Thanksgiving and I can't wait to hear back from you!

Regina

Bailey on the left
Sam on the right

Dear Regina

        Well thanks giving one of my toads died and he was mr froggy and the other one is toady my fav food is pizza and my fav drink is somthing i make by myself i mix sunny d and kool aid and lemon juice and roblox is not one game but a app were there is a bunch of games like 10000 games and my aunts dog name is scruffy and the cats name is rocky my favorite thing to do is play roblox watch youtube play out side and play with animals and eat and drink i order bean burrittos with no onions and at starbuck i get a coffic decaff that taste like chocolate and pepperments and i get cake pops and my favorite holidays are eastesr halloween and christmas

lilli:3

Addison

HI ADDISON,

I'M VERY SORRY TO HEAR ABOUT YOUR TOAD PASSING AWAY : (I HOPE YOU'RE DOING OK! I LOVE PIZZA TOO! WHAT DO YOU LIKE ON YOUR PIZZA? I LIKE PEPPERONI! YOUR DRINK SOUNDS VERY GOOD MIGHT HAVE TO TRY THAT SOMETIME! ROBLOX SOUNDS VERY FUN AND IT SOUNDS LIKE THERE'S A LOT OF THINGS TO DO ON THAT GAME! IF YOU COULD PICK ONE OUT OF THE 10,000 WHICH GAME WOULD BE YOUR FAVORITE? WHAT KIND OF VIDEOS DO YOU WATCH ON YOUTUBE? DO YOU PLAY WITH YOUR FRIENDS OUTSIDE? I ALSO MIGHT NEED TO TRY YOUR STARBUCKS ORDER IT SOUNDS VERY GOOD, I LOVE CHOCOLATE AND PEPPERMINT TOGETHER, IN FACT THEY MAKE A PEPPERMINT MOCHA THAT I THINK YOU'LL LIKE! AND OF COURSE YOU CAN'T GO TO STARBUCKS AND NOT GET A CAKE POP, I LIKE THE BIRTHDAY CAKE FLAVOR, WHICH ONE DO YOU LIKE?

I HOPE YOU HAD A FUN NEW YEARS! TALK TO YOU SOON!

REGINA

Dear Regina,
        Well my favorite games on roblox are wings of fire early acsess dragons life and forgotton worlds because i have gamepasses in those games i dont know my favorite cake pop flavor i wacth a lot of things on youtube like mostly everything i dont play with my friends our side in winter or covid but i did before that i will only eat peporoni and cheese pizza have you played among us i only play it at my dads because it doesnt work on my computer the non school one

-lilli

218

HI ADDISON!

HOW ARE YOU DOING FIRST OF ALL? HOW IS SCHOOL GOING? ARE YOU LEARNING ANYTHING FUN RIGHT NOW? YOUR ROBLOX GAMES ALL SOUND SUPER FUN TO PLAY AND ENTERTAINING! IF YOU HAD TO PICK ONE THING TO WATCH ON YOUTUBE WHAT WOULD IT BE, OR IF YOU CAN'T PICK JUST ONE, WHAT WOULD BE YOUR TOP 3 THINGS TO WATCH? I ACTUALLY WATCH YOUTUBE AS WELL, HAVE YOU HEARD OF THE LABRANT FAMILY DOING A YOUTUBE CHANNEL? I WATCH THEM FROM TIME TO TIME! I'M SORRY TO HEAR THAT YOU DON'T PLAY OUTSIDE DUE TO COVID, BUT IT'S BEEN SUPER COLD LATELY SO I WOULDN'T WANT TO BE OUTSIDE EITHER. WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE THING TO DO OUTSIDE IF COVID WASN'T AROUND? I ALSO REALLY LIKE PEPPERONI AND CHEESE PIZZA, IT DEFINITELY MY FAVORITE PIZZA TOO! THE TEAM AND I PLAY AMONG US ALL THE TIME, WE THINK IT'S SO FUN! WHAT COLOR CHARACTER ARE YOU? I'M THE WHITE ONE! WHAT ARE YOU GUYS LEARNING ABOUT IN SCHOOL RIGHT NOW, ANYTHING FUN? HOPE ALL IS WELL AND IT WAS GREAT HEARING BACK FROM YOU, TALK TO YOU SOON!!

REGINA

Dear Regina

:)

School is good and i am purple with devil horns in among us but sometimes i change my look/username if i could only watch three things on youtube it would be flamingo among us animated memes and undertale soundtrack   and i have to play friday night funkin today because is friday E i like the chicken nuggit song i searched up the labrent family and they make 5.5m dollars have you seen among us logic from gametoons XD   my favorite thing to do outside would be swim or run what is your favorite among us map and im ready for the air ship map whats your favorite among us pet and hat whats you favorite 3 colors combined

Bai Addison Out PEACE

HI ADDISON!

I HAVE NOT SEEN AMONG US LOGIC ON GAMETOONS. WHAT IS IT ABOUT? AND I'M NOT SURE WHICH MAP IS MY FAVORITE I LIKE THEM ALL? WHAT IS YOURS? MY AMONG US COLOR IS WHITE WITH THE BALLOON HAT. AND MY THREE FAVORITE COLORS COMBINED IS WHITE, YELLOW, AND THE CYAN COLOR. DID YOU GUYS GET TO HAVE A SPRING BREAK? DID YOU GO ANYWHERE? ME AND MY FRIEND CLAIRE ON THE TEAM WENT TO FLORIDA FOR 5 DAYS, IT WAS SO WARM AND FUN? WE WENT SWIMMING IN THE OCEAN AND SWAM IN THE POOL! DID YOU DO ANYTHING SPECIAL ON EASTER? DO YOU GUYS DO AN EASTER EGG HUNT? I HOPE YOU ARE DOING WELL AND I CAN'T WAIT TO TALK TO YOU SOON!

REGINA

THIS IS THE VIEW OF THE BEACH WE WERE AT!

UwU

Dear Regina, well among us logic is about well among us my favorite map would be skeld or airship on my spring break i didnt go eny where much i went to my dads on saturday and i dident do much for easter just finding eggs where would you want to live if you could choose anywhere in the world idk what i would pick

Whats your biggest fear mine would be spiders and heights if you had 3 wishes what would they be mine would be a vr headset the necklace from wings of fire and among us irl

Addison

HI ADDISON!

AMONG US LOGIC SOUNDS VERY INTERESTING I'LL HAVE TO CHECK THAT OUT SOMETIME! I REMEMBER FROM OUR ZOOM MEETING THAT YOU TOLD ME ABOUT YOUR EASTER ACTIVITIES, I LOVE FINDING EGGS ON EASTER, ME AND MY BROTHER AND SISTER ALWAYS COMPETE TO SEE WHO CAN GET THE MOST EGGS. MY BIGGEST FEAR IS HEIGHTS JUST LIKE YOU, DO NOT LIKE THEM AT ALL. I WOULD SAY SPIDERS TOO, THEY MAKE ME CRINGE! THOSE 3 WISHES ARE GREAT! I GUESS MY 3 WISHES WOULD BE UNLIMITED AMOUNT OF COTTON CANDY, A REALLY BIG HOUSE, AND THAT MY DOG COULD TALK, HAHA :) ADDISON IT HAS BEEN SO GOOD TO GET TO KNOW YOU, I'M SO SAD THAT THIS IS OUR LAST LETTER TO EACH OTHER :(IF YOU EVER WANT TO TALK I'M ALWAYS HERE! I'LL GIVE YOU MY EMAIL! AGAIN REALLY NICE TO MEET YOU!!

REGINA

Regina

I like icecream...and trains :> sad face sad face sad face sad face sad face sad face

<-This is squid dog   this is bob->

<-this is sarvente   ruv->

APPENDIX P

CHARLIE AND ALLY'S CORRESPONDENCE

Hey Guys - My name is Ally and I'm a junior here on the basketball team. I'm from about 45 minutes from here. I play guard. My major is business and finance. Some more about me. I have an older brother and sister. I also have 3 cats. I also like dogs and pretty much all animals. Some things that I do when I'm not playing basketball is hanging out with my friends. I like to do a lot of adventures outside like hiking. I like to visit other cities. I just went to Chicago with some of my teammates. So that's just a little about me. I can't wait to learn more about you guys and hopefully I'll hear from you guys soon. Have a good week.
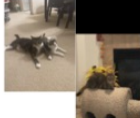
Dear Ally N,

   .It's an honor for you to be my mentor. My name is Charlie and I was a mascot for my school and my basketball team. I am 11 years old and my favorite sport is wrestling and my hobbies are going to school,games and watching wrestling and youtube. And that's most of the stuff about me. Do you like virtual school because I love virtual school because we get off really earlier than in-school school. Do you miss new berland? Because I really miss my grandpa in indiana ANd I don't see him that much but most of my family is in wisconsin. Do u have a pet because i do it's a dog and her name is daisy. I enjoyed writing this letter to you I'm excited to see you see you soon! :D

  Sincerely,

  Charlie

Hi Charlie!

I hope you have had a good couple of weeks! That is awesome that you were a mascot! What did you get to dress up as? I love to watch wrestling and I am sure you are amazing at it! I do not mind having virtual school, I just miss interacting with my classmates! Hopefully soon we will be able to be with our classmates again! What is your favorite class? My favorite class is Math because I love working with numbers. That is good that most of your family is in Wisconsin! I do miss home sometimes but it isn't too far from here which is nice! I actually do have pets! I have three cats. What kind of dog do you have? My brother actually just got a puppy!! I cannot wait to hear from you soon!! I hope you have/had a great Thanksgiving:)

From: Ally

Dear Ally,

   Hi again Ally thanks for the letter I hope you are having amazing weeks. I am wodering how is basketball for you I hope you have an amazing christmas!! When I was a mascot I was a bulldog and I used to cheer on my team but we sometimes didn't win but I was glad I was able to cheer on my team. And I am a huge fan of wrestling im just a huge fan of a different company called wwe and i customize figures I'm working on customizing a wrestler named Marty scurll. I miss interacting with my friends to covid-19 is the worst. Your cats are super cute do they like people visiting sometimes? My dog is a cocker spaniel and she loves people and she really loves her dog cookies. And I'm happy for your brother he is gonna be super happy with him/her. I hope i get to see you sooner than later as well I had an amazing thanksgiving i hope you did to!! And my favorite class is art. :D see you soon

   :from Charlie

Charlie

Hi Charlie,

Unfortunately we lost our first two games this past week but there are more opportunities ahead! We play two more games this Friday and Saturday! That is awesome that you were a mascot, sounds like a lot of fun! Do you have any tips for me on how to draw? I am not very good at Art so I may need your help:) I saw your video, your dog is super cute! I hope you had an amazing Christmas and I can't wait to hear from you soon!! Have a great day:)

Dear Ally,

   I HEARD YOU MADE THE GAME WINNING POINT OMG IM SO HAPPY FOR YOU how did you feel when you made the shot and win the game?!?! And for a drawing tip believe in yourself and take some tutorials and pause the videos. What was your first drawing? And thank you your cats are so cute! And i had an amazing christmas I went on a lot of trips and celebrated new year i had cookies,some pizza and cake :) did you have an amazing christmas? Do you plan on going back to school orstaying virtual i am going virtual so i can still be with mrs johnson. And I can't wait to hear from you soon have an amazing game good luck!!!! :D

sincerely , Charlie

Hi Charlie, thank you for writing back!

I was happy when I made the shot because we were able to get a big win! Thank you for the drawing tips! The first thing I ever drew was probably a cat but it was not very good:(I will have to look up some videos so I can draw better. What is your favorite thing to draw?

I also had an amazing Christmas! I spent time with my family and friends which was awesome. What trips did you go on over break? I am both virtual and in person for school which is nice. I am glad you chose to stay with Miss Johnson! I hope you have an amazing week and I cannot wait to talk to you soon!

Sincerely,

Ally

Dear Ally,

Once again congratulations on making the shot. It's no problem, I'm always down to help people with drawing. It's ok if the drawing didn't look good, I know I can't draw a cat so it's totally ok. My favorite thing to draw is like movie characters or cartoon characters.

I'm happy that you had an amazing break, I actually went to Indiana to see my grandpa.

What's it's like being both virtual and in person? I'm in person because I was missing out on the fun lol. I enjoyed writing you another letter again see you soon. :P

Sincerely,

Charlie

Charlie

Hi Charlie, thank you for writing back!

That is very kind of you to offer help with drawing. I bet you are able to help others in your class too! What kind of cartoon characters do you draw? I like having in person classes because it is nice to socialize with friends and classmates! When did you switch to in person? Do you like it better? I like having virtual too but I would prefer all in person! How was your visit with your grandpa? Do you get to see him often or just a couple times throughout the year? I have family that live close to me so I do not have to travel too far to see them!

Do you have plans for summer? I am planning on a couple vacations with my family that I am excited for. Other then that I will just be spending with family and friends, and working out with my teammate Hannah. I look forward to hearing from you soon, have a great week and I will talk to you soon!

-Ally :)

Ally

Thanks for writing back and no problem im always up to help people draw and yes i do help my friends on how to draw heads and using lines to map out faces I like drawing spongebob and the superheroes from movies such as batman and the flash, superman,wonder woman ect. And yes i do like in person better so i can focus more on my work without any distractions. My trip with my grandpa was good i rarely see him and i dont know what i want to do this summer its hard. I have a question though what was it like to be in 6th grade was it good was it bad was it ok? What was the good and bad? Thats all i want to know but i hope you have an amazing weekend and I will see you soon

Sincerely: Charlie

Charlie

Hi Charlie, thank you for writing back!

Hello Charlie, I am so glad we got to talk to each other over zoom! Thank you for giving me movie ideas. I will definitely watch them after school ends. You should try and show me one of your Spongebob drawings. That was one of my favorite shows when I was a kid.

Sixth grade was one of my favorite years! I made so many friends and learned a lot of new things! The only bad thing about sixth grade is that you have a little more homework but it is still a project. I also like being in person because I can focus more and be with my classmates and friends. Are you almost done with school? Do you have any plans for this summer? I hope to hear from you soon!

-Ally :)

Ally

I know this is our last time talking and it was really fun it was an honor to have you as my mentor and i loved talking to you on zoom i hope you enjoy the movies i recommended Thank you for telling me about 6th grade and what it was like not very excited for more work but its gotta get done somehow and what are the odds i like in person cause focus more to lol. And yes actually i have one more month until the end of the school year idk what i want to do this summer i think i will just let summer come and then think. I had so much fun writing you letters and showing you my drawings i hope you have fun this summer and good luck in school i will miss talking to you :(.

Sincerely

Charlie